

The Poetry of Science: Projectionism and Electroorganism

Irina Lebedeva

By the 1920s, notions of the tasks confronting art were undergoing revision and young artists rejected many of the aesthetic and philosophical ideas of the older Russian avant-garde. The younger generation used the artistic idiom of non-objectivity to offer new interpretations of scientific and technological achievements, which were now stripped of their earlier, almost mystical aura. Despite their seemingly irreconcilable differences, the Productivists—who sought to enlist scientific advances in the remaking of everyday life and who rejected the easel painting—and the members of Ost (the Society of Easel Painters, 1925–32)—who took a romantic view of scientific and technological progress and who argued for the renewed viability of the easel painting—were united in their view of industry as the most significant sphere of human endeavor, worthy of the closest attention.

At the beginning of the decade, new ideas of this sort were being formulated at the Moscow Vkhutemas (the Higher Artistic-Technical Workshops), which had become not merely a place for acquiring professional skills but the scene of fierce quarrels among various student groups. In 1924, their wrangles were put on public view at the *Pervaia diskussionnaia vystavka ob "edinenii aktivnogo revoliutsionnogo iskusstva* (*First Discussional Exhibition of Associations of Active Revolutionary Art*), a show of work by faculty, students, and recent graduates of Vkhutemas that opened on May 11th at 54 Tverskaia Street. "This exhibition is truly a 'discussional' one," wrote the critic Iakov Tugendkhol'd. "It includes seven different groups of young artists, each of them at odds with its neighbor, and all of them with the public, and each claiming the label 'left' for itself alone." Nikolai Triaskin later recalled: "This was an exhibition where people walked about waiting for a fight to break out, for we defended our convictions very hotly, while remaining comrades among ourselves."²

Triaskin exhibited with the Proektsionisty (Projectionists), whose other members were Sergei Luchishkin, Solomon Nikritin, Mikhail Plaksin, Kliment Red'ko, and Aleksandr Tyshler (several of whom, a year later, were members of Ost). Their works, whose number exceeded that of any other exhibiting group, betrayed an interest in formal and analytical questions. In paintings such as Luchishkin's *Koordinaty zhivopisnoi ploskosti* (*Coordinates of a Painterly Plane*, 1924, plate no. 359), Nikritin's *Tektonicheskoe issledovanie* (*Tectonic Research*, 1921–24), Plaksin's *Planetarnoe* (*Planetary*, 1922, plate no. 345), Red'ko's *Arkhitektonika prostranstva* (*Architectonics of Space*, 1923), and Tyshler's *Organizatsionnye koordinaty napriazheniia tsveta* (*Organizational Coordinates of Color Tension*, 1923), the group endeavored to render such complex physical phenomena as radio and electricity and to convey the mechanics of motion and the expansiveness of space.

The critics, however, took a negative view of these canvases. Aleksei Fedorov-Davydov, for instance, wrote: "The hunger for knowledge, for Positivism, has never, it seems, been as strong as it is now. This materialistic way of thinking expresses itself in the urge to rationalize everything. This urge is sometimes carried to extremes, as it is by the 'Projectionists' . . . whose paintings are more reminiscent of geometrical drawings."³ Tugendkhol'd's reaction was similar: "The exhibition is something of a landmark, all the more welcome since the paintings shown evince a definite turning away from the non-objective abstraction recently in vogue and toward figuration—a contemporary genre. To be sure, not all of the participants in the exhibition have moved beyond the stage of quasi-scientific schematization. The schematic works of Tyshler, Nikritin, Red'ko (in part), and others fall into this category, though they are not without merit in their handling of line and color."⁴

The members of the Projectionist group, linked by personal

friendships⁵ as well as by artistic affinities, first came together in 1922.⁶ During that year, they organized an experimental Projectionist Theater at Vkhutemas and participated in an exhibition at Moscow's Museum of Painterly Culture.⁷ That exhibition, held at 52 Povarskaia Street from December 25th to 27th, combined permanent exhibits from the museum with works that were to be added to the *Erste russische Kunstausstellung* (*First Russian Art Exhibition*, Berlin, 1922), in which 180 artists were already represented, when it traveled to its next scheduled stop in Paris.⁸

Tugendkhol'd wrote of the exhibition at the museum:

One must welcome the effort to return to the investigation of color, to work on canvas, to work on paintings—such attempts at a deeper study of the qualities of paint and its application as are evident in the work of Nikritin, Red'ko, Tyshler, and Labas. There is still, of course, excessive sophistry, yet the unexpected sonority of saturated color and the loving attention to the surface of the painting itself are pleasing. Nikritin has a fine feeling for depth and its connection with this or that color, form, and density {faktura}. Red'ko studies the interdependence of painting and the sensation of movement . . . Labas treats the surface of his work with the loving care of an icon painter.

I repeat: all this as yet amounts to little more than "laboratory experiments." Yet even so, it represents a small step forward, out of the four walls of the laboratory and into the flesh-and-blood reality of the living world. A step forward from the one-sidedness of Malevich's purely color Suprematism and Tatlin's colorless Constructivism.⁹

Tugendkhol'd's juxtaposition of Malevich and Tatlin, the recognized leaders of the older Russian avant-garde, with the younger generation of left artists is highly symptomatic. Creation of their own artistic language was an essential element of the Projectionists' program. The group's organizer and chief theorist, Nikritin, wrote:

In 1922 two signal events occurred in Moscow, which—as always happens with profound manifestations of an era—met with too little attention from the local critical press: just a few unrevealing articles in Pravda, Izvestiia, Working Moscow {Rabochaia Moskva}, and Spectacles {Zrelishcha}. These two events were a series of performances by the Projectionist Theater and an exhibition of works—to be sent abroad—by the "united group of young artists," the Projectionists. Both the performances and the paintings were a counterweight to the Suprematism of Malevich and the Constructivism of Tatlin and Rodchenko.

{The Projectionists} appeared without any fanfare or earth-shattering manifestos; they were fed up with the endless, unproductive barrage of public declarations (an old tradition with the Italian Futurists). They came forth with a clearly defined philosophy of their art and a cycle of finished works.¹⁰

From the start, the Projectionists also positioned themselves in opposition to production art. "This latest fad," Nikritin wrote, "is all the more ridiculous for claiming to construct everyday life (!!!). Whereas any sensible person understands that daily life is determined not by artfully constructed beds, kiosks, clothing, or theater sets but by the *technical level of the instruments of production and the clarity of the ensuing worldview.*"¹¹ The Projectionists' slogans, as formulated by Nikritin, proclaimed the following:

1. *The surface plane of the painting possesses meaning insofar as efficiently organizing lines of projection lead from it to an optimal culture of everyday life.*
2. *Painters must stay in their places, that is, not enter production.*
3. *Their works should be exclusively planned and methodical; on their basis a thousand schools and laboratories should arise,*

cultivating a new ability and consciousness among the masses—in relation to an optimal social-technical function of materials.¹²

The works by the Projectionists exhibited at the Museum of Painterly Culture in 1922 and chosen to accompany the *Erste russische Kunstausstellung* to Paris were not shown in that city, after all (nor had they been shown in Berlin or listed in the catalogue). Instead, the show reopened in Amsterdam in May 1923. There, judging by documents retained by the family of David Shterenberg—the head of Izo Narkompros (the Department of Fine Arts of the People's Commissariat of Enlightenment) and the organizer of the exhibition—sales of works out of the show were brisk.¹³ Red'ko later wrote: "As for last year's works, which had been on exhibit in Moscow—where are they now? In Berlin? Amsterdam? Paris? Venice? Who knows!"¹⁴

Red'ko published his "Deklaratsiia elektroorganizma" ("Declaration on Electroorganism") at the time of the 1922 exhibition, and it is evidently this conjunction that has caused scholars to refer to the Projectionists as the "Electroorganism group." In a draft of the declaration, dated December 23, 1922, Red'ko describes the tenets of his movement:

THE ART OF TODAY is the worldview of the substance of radio, from which "potentiality"—energy in a variety of forms—arises. Light is the highest manifestation of matter . . . The art of "today" explains anew the concept of the "abstract," as well as how time exists in and of itself and how cognition is directed toward perception.

Inasmuch as today's known value of the speed of light has outstripped all velocities previously known to exist, artists study the elements that constitute new periodic states of electromatter, constructing their works according to the spatial mechanics of two reciprocal forces—compression and expansion, distancing and approach . . .

The art of "today" explains: I build out of water, out of air, out of wind, out of dynamite, and these are the elements of the architectonics of the electroorganism. On the basis of the "electroorganisms" that we have created (works painted on a two-dimensional surface), we can say that our art, welcoming the unmediated worldview of the savage, bases its unmediated worldview on the culture of the periodic state of the elements of modern physics, on the ideas of medicine, on the ideas of the struggle for a common world and for control of the process of (a) creative and (b) mechanical work . . .

The artist of "today" . . . observing a periodicity in the "nature" of chaotic phenomena, systematizes that periodicity's objective factor by (a) measuring it (i.e., the factor) by mental apprehension, (b) advancing it to an electroorganism, and (c) establishing its movement in time—in the guise of "timbre" (the rising and falling function), in the guise of the space of the visible and audible, space encompassable by memory, and astronomical space.

That which is perceived is "realized" by the technical devices of "cinema"—by an economical, mobile utilization of electro-energy. "Cinema" is the problem of form in painting; cinematic technique is the means of realization. The light and color of cinema are crowding out "paint," which yields to the strength of "light-matter." The two-dimensional cinematic plane "electrokinetically" reveals the method of mastering the essence of the electroorganism in painting . . .

To study the forms of "electroorganism" is to draw nearer the forms of nature (to approach—from the first image formed by the primitive—a higher technological culture). "Electroorganism" as an entity (a) reveals in art new methods of studying the forms of the earth in relation to the forms found in the astronomical "absolute"; (b) discovers new elements in nature, explaining them in art; and (c) psychically cultivates "influence" over the spectator . . . "Electroorganism" is neither "Naturalism" nor "Realism" nor "Futurism" nor "Constructivism," for it originates in the properties of "universal demand" and "consumption."

"Electroorganism in art" is first a system of the psycho-philosophy

of "intersocial life" and of "astronomical being" and, second, an architectonics that raises the concept of the abstract to the essence of the maximum unit of velocity, replacing various philosophical systems such as Naturalism, Realism, Futurism, and Constructivism, and clarifying physical-psychic relationships in the "electroorganism."¹⁵

During 1922–23, Red'ko produced a large series of paintings and drawings under the general rubric of *Electroorganism*: *Dinamit* (Dynamite, 1922, plate no. 349), *Skorost'* (Speed), *Dinamika form i tsveta* (Dynamics of Forms and Color), *Dinamika fokusa* (Dynamics of Focus), and others. These experimental compositions were a reflection of Red'ko's enthusiastic embrace of the results of the scientific and technological revolution. "We are moving into the realm of science," he had written in 1921, "This is the first unmistakable sign of . . . the rebirth of art . . . We are great prophets. We train our reason, sharpen our powers of observation by means of analysis, and gather what is dispersed in dynamic forms . . . In art a pregnant silence reigns. What an extraordinary time lies before our young generation! Everyone is moving into the exact sciences."¹⁶

Such utopian ideas about the all-embracing possibilities of scientific and technological progress were a characteristic feature of the time. In his effort to represent complex physical phenomena or technically equipped factories and laboratories, Red'ko created, above all, fantasies on scientific and industrial themes in which the human figure was merely an element of stylized structures and mechanisms (some of these canvases were shown at the *First Discussional Exhibition*).¹⁷ "There is nothing picturesque!" he wrote. "One has to penetrate to the innermost heart of things and calculate the physical world . . . Space and gravity—these are the fundamental problems to which to apply the power of the artist."¹⁸

The declaration of the Projectionists published in the catalogue of the *First Discussional Exhibition* was entitled "Nashi ocherednye lozungi" ("Our Slogans on This Occasion") and asserted:

The artist is the inventor of new SYSTEMS which objectively signify objects and works of art . . .

Paintings and three-dimensional structures are the most convincing means of expressing the PROJECTIONS (the METHOD) of the organization of materials . . .

The artist is a producer not of consumer goods (cupboards and pictures) but of PROJECTIONS (the METHOD) of the organization of materials . . .

MILLIONS OF PRODUCERS WILL MAKE THE NORMALIZED OBJECTS OF DAILY LIFE . . .

Art is the science of an objective system of the organization of materials . . .

*Every organization comes into being through the METHOD.*¹⁹

Nikritin, author of the catalogue declaration, had been at work on the theory of Projectionism during 1923–24.²⁰ "Projectionism," he had written in 1923,

is a doctrine postulating the evolutionary character of the "laws" of the world, a doctrine that teaches that nature is "today" evolving toward the tangible realization of universal organization . . . I call Projectionism the sole and final doctrine in the sense that it presents in its basic traits the only objective way to a genuine realization of the world's energy, hence also of the life of each separate human being.

I call this doctrine the final one in the sense that the interrelation between man and the world outlined in it cannot fail to be objectively regarded as the final form of interrelation, given the magnitude of its embrace of the whole . . .

I call this doctrine Projectionist because the Projectionist, universally planned intellectual comprehensibility of every human

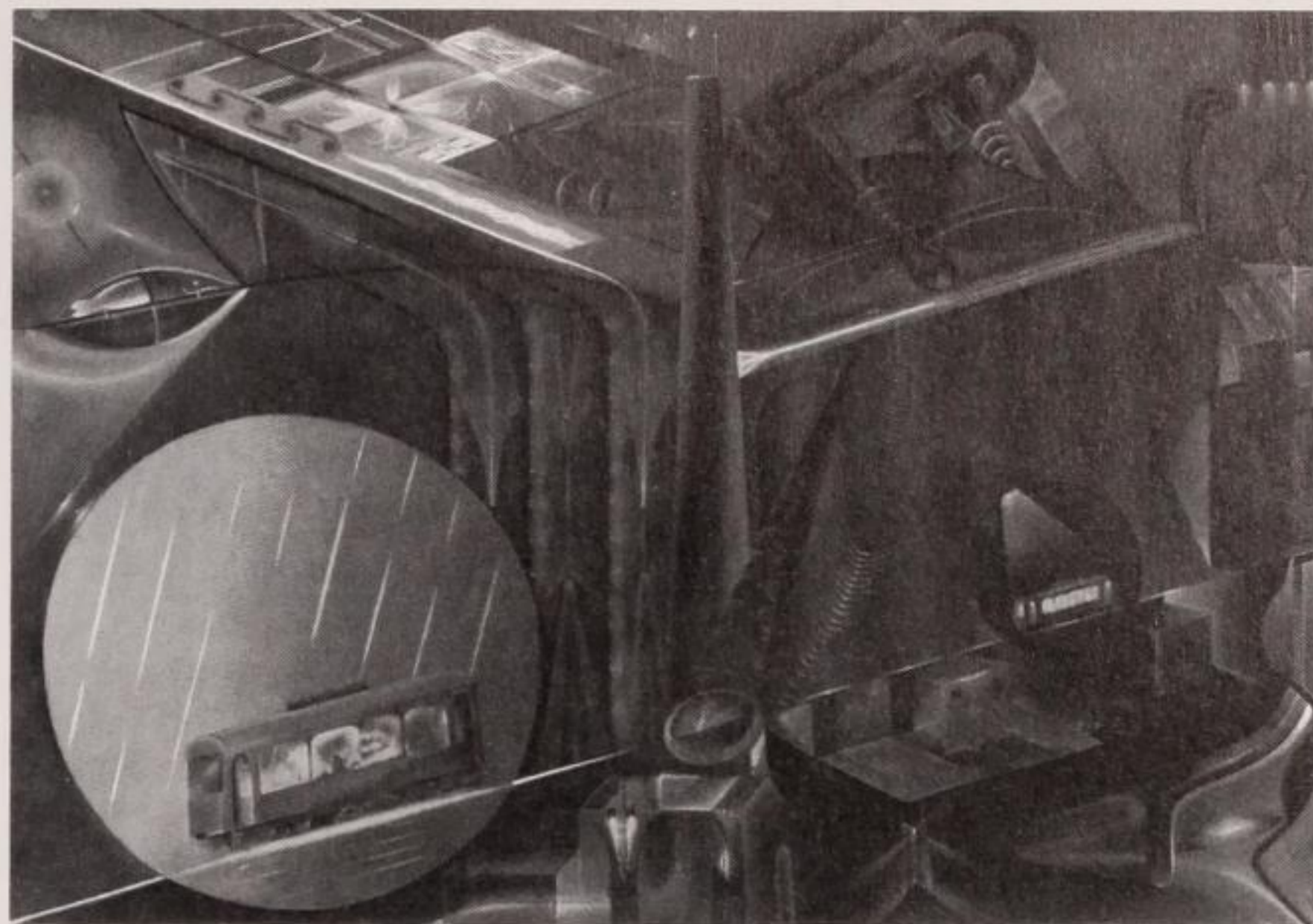


fig. 1
Kliment Red'ko
Composition (Factory), 1922.
Oil on canvas, 69.5 x 101 cm.
State Kasteev Kazakhstan Museum of Arts, Alma-Ata.

action and word in relation to the realization of the world's energy and hence also the energy of each separate human being, his actual (not political, but social) well-being, is the cardinal, most urgent task of our age, the single goal to struggle for."

The artist, according to this theory, should produce not works of art but only their "projections," on whose basis any person in any number of schools or laboratories could create an object. Theater, for its part, was regarded as a projection of theater in general, of a theater that, disconnected from any text, could function in any country. Unity of actor and spectator could be achieved by means of mobile abstract sets and evocative, "self-sufficient" sound. One of the historians of Ost, Vladimir Kostin, has written that "for all the theoretical weakness of the basic tenets of Projectionism, it must be said that it, along with certain other movements of the twenties, anticipated one of the fashionable trends in contemporary West European art—so-called Conceptual Art."²²

Surviving archival documents include a text composed by Red'ko for the *First Discussional Exhibition* in which he outlined the goals of the Projectionists—or Method—group:

The work of the Method group flows from the evolutionary development of the bases of formal achievements in art.

For us, easel painting is the most expansive school of philosophy.

Monumental painting and architecture are one of the bases of a fundamental understanding of the laws of the plane.

All this defines the essence, indicative of our fundamental link with the science of the past. In the present . . . investigation of the color environment and its influence on the work located in it. In the future . . . the Method group applies its achievements in laboratory analysis and synthesis to economic production . . . The Method group extends its hand to its comrades in other left groups working alongside it, developing the tasks of contemporary art by means of collective thought . . .

The ideology of the Method group: "Struggle."

First, as a movement Forward—{toward a} historical goal.

Second, with those who are against us.

*The naming of this group "Method" will explain to our spectator what is to come and enable him to think ahead to our subsequent results in 1925, 1926, 1927, and the years following.*²³

For all Nikritin's and Red'ko's desire to provide a theoretical underpinning for the group, which they represented as united in its artistic aims and practice, the works shown by the Projectionists at the *First Discussional Exhibition* revealed a variety of interests among the young painters. Such works as Plaksin's *Planetary* and *Pervobytnoe (Primordial)* or Red'ko's *Periodicheskaia osnova sinteticheskogo obraza (glubina) (The Periodic Basis of a Synthetic Image {Depth}, 1924)* and *Monumental'noe postroenie fizicheskogo razvitiia (soprikosnovenie) (Monumental Construction of Physical Development {Contiguity}, 1924)* were quests for a harmonious conjoining of abstract ideas from the exact sciences with sense perception of the surrounding world. Red'ko did not write by accident apropos these paintings: "All these works are *labor over feeling*."²⁴

Non-objective canvases in which emotion played a significant part may also be found among the early works of Labas. And during the same years, Tyshler constructed "fantastical decorative compositions, made up of details of machines and other apparatuses. Executed in reddish-orange and light and dark blue on a black ground, they were all but phosphorescent, radiating now a cold, now a hot light, which gently suffused the dark surface of the canvas."²⁵

In his introduction to the catalogue for Red'ko's solo exhibition in Moscow in 1926, Fedorov-Davidov offered this description of Red'ko's works in that vein: "The attempt to

represent in visual form abstract formulae and phenomena of electro-technology has led to abstract-utopian compositions whose subject, in the end, is emotional feeling. They are the purest expression of analytical and rationalizing painting, which aspired to find a painterly-emotional formula for scientific and technological phenomena."²⁶ The element of mythologizing inherent in these paintings carried the subject depicted beyond the confines of purely formal experiment.

The works of Nikritin and Luchishkin were of a different, more concrete, nature. At the *First Discussional Exhibition*, Nikritin showed his *Tectonic Research*—comprised of texts, photographs, sketches, reliefs, and a three-dimensional construction—and Luchishkin fifteen analytical works, including *Coordinates of a Painterly Plane* and *Koordinaty sootnosbeniia zhivopisnykh mass. Anormal' (Coordinates of the Relationship of Painterly Masses: Abnormal, 1924, plate no. 360)*. Luchishkin later recalled:

*When I graduated, it turned out that the chief factor in my being awarded the title of an artist of the first rank was not my diploma painting but the analytical works I showed at the Discussional Exhibition. They were the crowning stage of my formal experiments. I was looking for the foundations of our creative work and reasoned thus: if there are coordinates for measurement of the plane, there must be coordinates of compositional structure and coordinates of the relationship of masses. And I found them by means of analysis and juxtaposition of a large quantity of masterpieces of world art. I demonstrated everything graphically: I showed not only all types of the coordinates of the normal but also deviations; I supplied a chart of the basic types of compositional structures, with examples. After the exhibition, these analytical works became part of the collection of the Museum of Painterly Culture, and many years later I discovered them at the Tret'iakov Gallery.*²⁷

Triaskin contributed to the *First Discussional Exhibition* models, sketches, and photographs of an *Universal'nyi teatral'nyi stanok (Universal Theatrical Set)*. Of the "constructive system" embodied in these exhibits Triaskin wrote many years later: "I did not belong to the group of those [at the exhibition] who called themselves Constructivists—the Stenberg brothers, Gan, and, I believe, Denisovskii. I felt that constructions should be functional in a goal-oriented way . . . I exhibited sets for clubs and theaters which could be raised, lowered, or moved apart."²⁸

These works did have a utilitarian cast, since they were earmarked for the performances of the Projectionist Theater,²⁹ in which Nikritin and Luchishkin participated with Triaskin. Triaskin's mobile sets were also employed in an experimental production of Anatolii Mariengof's tragedy, *Zagovor durakov (A Conspiracy of Fools)*, in the Hall of Columns of the House of Unions in Moscow on May 16, 1923. A small exhibition—of Luchishkin's color charts and of Triaskin's sketches and movable constructions, made from laths, of a cube, a sphere, and a cone—was held in the lobby of the hall. "I had set things up," Triaskin subsequently recalled, "so that if you pulled one or another cord, everything changed shape—these planes moved over here, and those over there. The laths also changed position, depending on the angle from which you viewed them, and you had only to tug at them to get a new work of art."³⁰

Petr Vil'iams, Iurii Pimenov, Luchishkin, and A. Akhmanitskaia were among the performers. "[Sergei] Esenin came, and [Vadim] Shershenevich, of course. There was a pretty big crowd," Triaskin recalled.

All the chairs had been removed, there was room to stand only along the sides, and in the middle was my ladder. And since we couldn't pay for the ladder, nobody had done any rehearsing on it. The

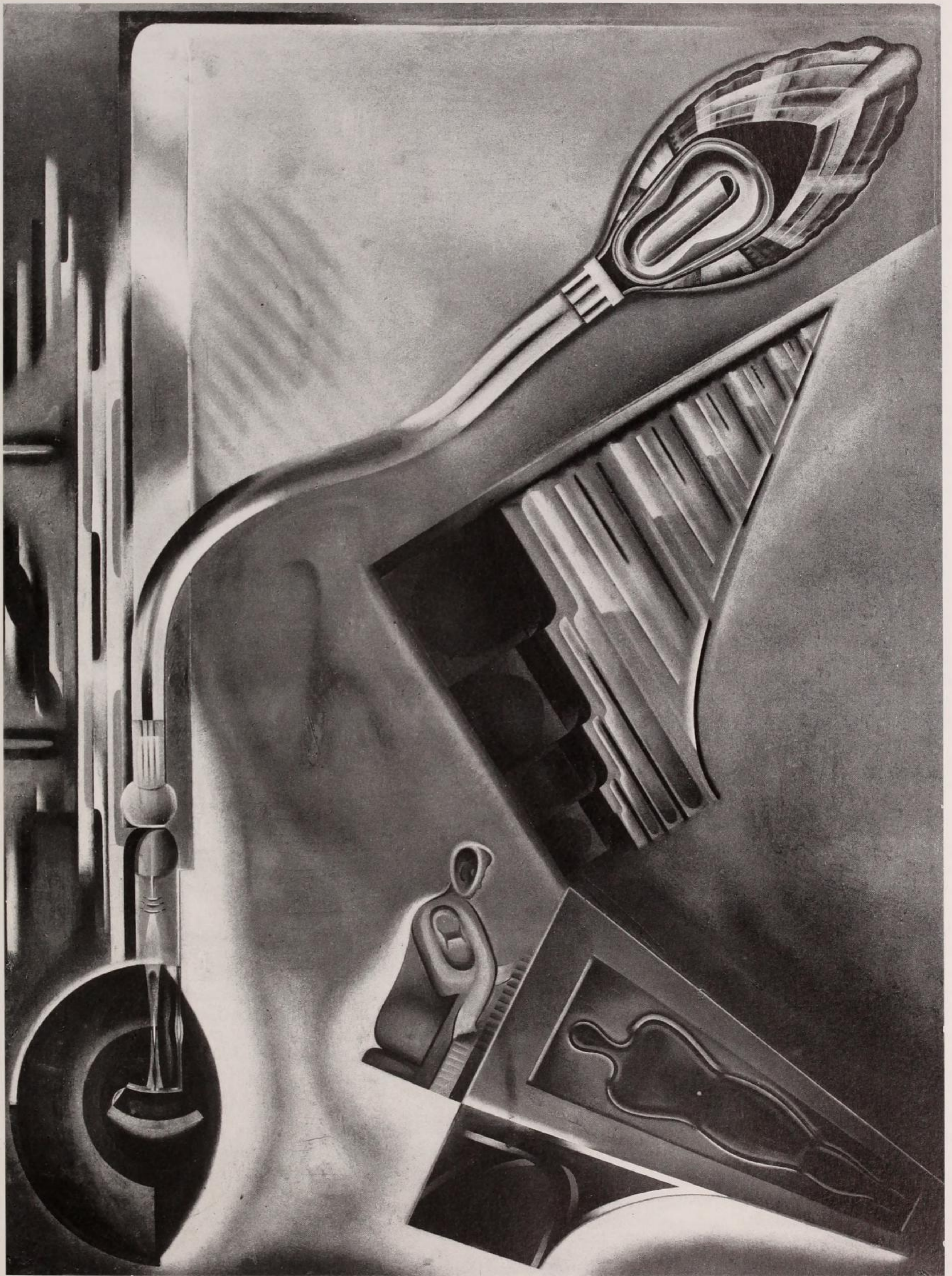


fig. 2
Kliment Red'ko
Composition, 1923.
Oil on canvas, 105 x 81 cm.
Muzeum Okręgowo, Chełm.

audience had already gathered and the ladder had been brought in, but the actors didn't know what to do with it: they would press it in one place, and all of a sudden the rungs would fly upward; they would pull elsewhere, and suddenly the whole thing would come apart. They did all they could; they struggled with that ladder throughout the performance, and at last left it for dead, just some kind of triangle standing there. I was, naturally, quite upset.³¹

Triaskin had also provided the actors playing fools at the funeral of Anna Ioannovna a kind of hoop into which to climb. Yet the hoop, like the ladder, did not work as intended. Pimenov, Luchishkin, and Vil'iams, inside the hoop, "were bumped by someone (and this while they were delivering their lines) . . . And until the hoop collided with something else, they were unable to get out. The upshot was that a remarkable review appeared . . . [under the title] 'A Conspiracy of Fools against the Public.'³²

A review by a certain Müller, published in a newspaper abroad, rendered a somewhat unexpected judgment on this production. He discerned a danger in the tilt toward technological development and the worship of the machine that had become symptomatic of the age. "I was struck even more forcefully," he wrote, "by the new liturgical music in the House of Unions. The ceremony I am talking about was held in honor of the official liturgy of the so-called Engineerists (Projectionists) . . . A Stations of the Cross of sorts, an enactment of the sacrifice of the lesser species of the individual to the higher order of a mechanized, almost soulless, collective man."³³ He took particular note of artists' universal absorption in industry and technology:

Lately in Russia, the machine has become a new idol that greedily devours ever new victims. Many efforts have already been made to reveal the machine's mysterious essence; now they are about to subject their own lives and the entire productivity of the globe to its laws.

The worship of the machine in the new Russia has all the hallmarks of an ardently espoused cult. This was very evident to me on my visits to the studios and workshops of the new artists.³⁴

"Worship of the machine" was not, however, a uniform phenomenon. Thus the works of Aleksandr Deineka, Pimenov, and Vil'iams—the leaders of Ost—embodied a romantic faith that the problems and tasks presented by the new era could be solved with the help of scientific and technological advances. Among the Productivists, by contrast, interest in engineering assumed a utilitarian cast and the human being was, in many ways, considered subordinate. Whereas for the Projectionists, man was the affirmation of the self-sufficient value of the future fruits of civilization. The period during which the achievements of science and technology served as the Projectionists' fundamental subject was, moreover, a brief one. Those who became members of Ost changed their orientation.³⁵ (This is not to say, however, that the activity of the Projectionists was merely a stage in the formation of the aesthetics of Ost.)

Any innovative idea, once it has attained the peak of development in the work of great artists, inevitably leads, if blindly pursued, to a dead end. The search for new spheres in which to apply the discoveries made earlier is one means of escape. By joining the formal achievements of the previous generation of vanguard artists to new themes and subject matter—wherein lay their originality—the Projectionists marked one route out of impasse.

—Translated, from the Russian, by Walter Arndt

Notes

1. Ia. T[ugendkhol'd], "Diskussionnaia vystavka," *Izvestiia*, May 31, 1924.
2. N. A. Triaskin, "Vospominaniia," 1988, private archive, p. 12.
3. A. Fedorov-Davydov, "Khudozhestvennaia zhizn' Moskvy," quoted in *Russkoe i sovetskoe iskusstvo* (Moscow, 1975), p. 16.
4. Tugendkhol'd, "Diskussionnaia vystavka."
5. Labas was friendlier with Tyshler and Nikritin, Triaskin with Luchishkin, and Red'ko with Nikritin than each was with the others, according to Triaskin's memoirs. Red'ko and Nikritin, the chief theorists of the group, had met in Kiev in 1920; they came to Moscow together to enroll at Vkhutemas, and for a long time lived and studied in the same workshop. Yet as early as November 1920, Red'ko noted in his diary: "We shall never understand one another. He because of his desire to enlist comrades-in-arms in his cause and disciples of his theory, which does not exist for me; and me because I also see before me possibilities of following certain principles which in the course of my life I shall endeavor to establish with all the strength of my talent." Central State Archive for Literature and Art, Moscow, f. 2359, op. 1, ed. khr. 118, l. 16.
6. In a text written by Nikritin, evidently in 1925, he describes the circumstances leading to the formation of the Projectionist group:

On December 31, 1920, Nikritin gave a talk at Vkhutemas on the subject of "Problems of Contemporary Art (Theater and Painting)." His basic argument was that no existing group in art (theater and painting) was responsive to the conditions of the era; that young artists must create their own artistic organization; and that this organization must be, on the one hand, a group of painters and, on the other, a group of theater artists—the two groups united in a single federation capable of expanding and attracting to its ranks workers in other arts who adopt the viewpoint of the new association.

The talk was followed a discussion, as a result of which it was decided to create such an association. To this end, an organizing committee was elected . . . The association was founded, and it carried on its work (in painting, architecture, and theater) until the spring of 1922. That spring the association was disbanded, but a (theater) group of four remained, resolved not to give up but to continue the association's work—for the time being, only in theater. These four—Bogatyrev, Luchishkin, Nikritin, and Svobodin—were also the founders and organizers (the core leaders) of the Projectionist Theater. So as to advance this movement, steps were taken to strengthen theatrical work, to develop and expand it; as a result, a theater workshop, in full operation and giving performances, was organized" (Central State Archive for Literature and Art, Moscow, f. 2717, op. 1, ed. khr. 76, l. 1).

7. The Museum of Painterly Culture continued thereafter to play an important role in the lives of these artists. Nikritin, Labas, and Tyshler were members of its Research Board, and Triaskin and Nikritin conducted tours.

Different sources provide different lists of the group members who participated in the exhibition: Nikritin, Red'ko, Tyshler, Labas, and Komissarenko (Ia. Tugendkhol'd, "Vystavka v Muzee zhivopisnoi kul'tury," *Izvestiia*, January 10, 1923); Vil'iams, Komissarenko, Labas, Luchishkin, Nikritin, Red'ko, Triaskin, and Tyshler (V. P. Lapshin, "Pervaia vystavka russkogo iskusstva. Berlin. 1922 god. Materialy k istorii sovetsko-germanskikh khudozhestvennykh sviazei," *Sovetskoe iskusstvoznanie* 1 [1982], pp. 327–62); Borisov, Labas, Tyshler, Nikritin, Luchishkin, Triaskin, and others (Central State Archive for Literature and Art, Moscow, f. 2717, op. 1, ed. khr.

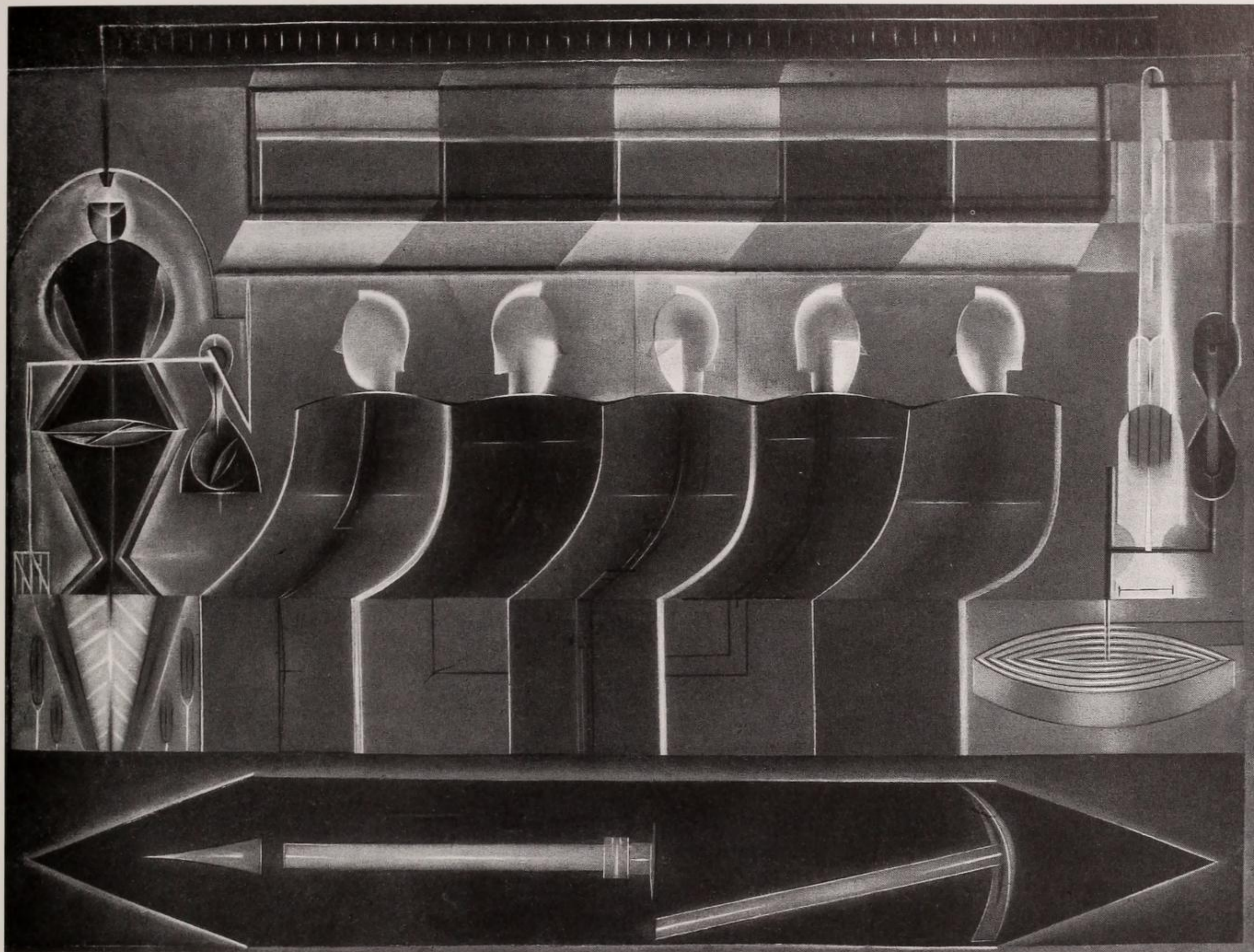


fig. 3
Kliment Red'ko
Compositional Study, 1922.
Oil on canvas, 49 x 64 cm.
Muzeum Okregowe, Chelm.

15, l. 16); Nikritin, Luchishkin, Labas, Komissarenko, Plaksin, Red'ko, Triaskin, and Tyshler (V. Kostin, *OST* [Leningrad: Khudozhnik RSFSR, 1976], p. 20).

8. All information in this essay on the *Erste russische Kunstausstellung* is taken from Lapshin, "Pervaia vystavka russkogo iskusstva."

9. Tugendkhol'd, "Vystavka v Muzei zhivopisnoi kul'tury." Luchishkin, noting that the exhibition consisted largely of abstract works, later wrote apropos his own paintings:

The works by Labas, Tyshler, and Red'ko, as well as two works of mine executed in (Nadezhda) Udal'tsova's workshop, which were selected (for the Erste russische Kunstausstellung) were initially shown in the Museum of Painterly Culture . . . In them I wanted to go beyond those devices that Udal'tsova sanctioned—to liberate spatiality from the conventions of planarity, to express the fluidity of space, its infinite changeability—and I began to destroy planar composition and to endow it with a free fluidity, which led to a particular complexity of composition and coloring" (S. A. Luchishkin, Ia ochen' liubliu zhizn'. Stranitsy vospominanii [Moscow: Sovetskii khudozhnik, 1988], p. 60).

10. Central State Archive for Literature and Art, Moscow, f. 2717, op. 1, ed. khr. 15, l. 15, l. 7.

11. *Ibid.*, l. 10.

12. *Ibid.*, l. 25.

13. See Lapshin, "Pervaia vystavka russkogo iskusstva."

14. Central State Archive for Literature and Art, Moscow, f. 2359, op. 1, ed. khr. 92, l. 13.

15. *Ibid.*, l. 41–42.

16. Central State Archive for Literature and Art, Moscow, f. 2359, op. 1, ed. khr. 118, l. 24–25.

17. *Formula "Ia"* (*Formula of the Ego*, 1923), now in the Muzeum Okręgowy, Chełm, Poland, was one of them. The drawing *Formula "Ia"*. *Sidiashchii za roalem (Formula of the Ego: At the Piano*, 1923) in the Central State Archive for Literature and Art, Moscow, bears this inscription by the artist: "*Formula of the Ego* refers to questions of psychiatry and is a letter to those perplexed by the *Electroorganism* paintings."

18. Central State Archive for Literature and Art, Moscow, f. 2359, op. 1, ed. khr. 118, l. 24–25.

19. *Katalog. I-aia diskussionnaia vystavka ob "edinenii aktivnogo revoliutsionnogo iskusstva* (Moscow, 1924), p. 9.

20. In 1924 he had written, in particular:

BASICS

1. All intellectual work of the masses concentrated on one discipline—on the Projectionist expression of an organizational classification and methodology—is the realization of Projectionism.

2. The contemporary art of Projectionism is tectonics (it is the algebra of organizational science).

3. Its spectator is a well-prepared master of the guild.

4. Its task is to train cadres of instructors from all branches of industry in the laws of tectonics and their proper application.

5. Its goal is: (a) the masses (every person) knowing the laws of tectonics and how to apply them in the arrangement of materials, at work, in their biological-social life; (b) a way of life in which the business and work-connected part of each day includes, by its very structure, all the abundance of economic blessings . . .

7. Every worker who realizes point no. 1 in his work is a Projectionist. (Central State Archive for Literature and Art, Moscow, f. 2717, op. 1, ed. khr. 17, l. 24).

21. S. Nikritin, "Edinstvennoe i poslednee. Materialisticheskaia sistema konstruktivnogo idealizma," 1923, Central State Archive for Literature and Art, Moscow, f. 2717, op. 1, ed. khr. 16, l. 51–52.

22. Kostin, *OST*, p. 19.

23. Central State Archive for Literature and Art, Moscow, f. 2359, op. 1, ed. khr. 92, l. 16–17. Red'ko made this diary entry on May 29, 1924: "I'm deliberating on the theoretical grounding of my 1923–24 works, which I'm thinking of entitling *Luminism*, since this is the logical outgrowth of my work on periodicity" (Manuscript Division, State Tret'iakov Gallery, Moscow, f. 137, ed. khr. 44, l. 11). He defined *Svechenizm* (*Luminism*) thus:

1. *Painting is the organizer of atmospheric phenomena.*

2. *Astronomy and meteorology are an analytic means of painting.*

3. *Light in painting is not light but luminosity.*

4. *Synthesis of color-forms in painting in the passage of currents of matter through luminosity.*

5. *The Northern Lights are an index of the new scientific foundation of luminosity in the energy of light.*

6. *The consciousness of painting: the movement of gaseous currents in the atmosphere—measured by luminosity (Central State Archive for Literature and Art, Moscow, f. 2359, op. 1, ed. khr. 92, l. 32).*

24. *Ibid.*, l. 47.

25. F. Syrkina, *Aleksandr Grigor'evich Tyshler* (Moscow, 1966), p. 13.

26. *Vystavka kartin i risunkov K. N. Red'ko. 1914–1926* (Moscow, 1926), p. 8.

27. Luchishkin, *Ia ochen' liubliu zhizn'*, p. 67.

28. Triaskin, "Vospominaniia." He considered the works of the Constructivists to be of an aesthetic cast. Nikolai Triaskin, conversation with author, March 20, 1991.

29. Nikritin wrote a brief history of the Projectionist Theater workshop—which combined the features of a "laboratory, school, and experimental theater studio"—from its founding on January 10, 1922 to its demise in February 1925. He described the course of the workshop's formal investigations into "general laws of the spatial and temporal organization of motion" and the "architectonics of a common mobile culture," as well as the charting in analytical tables of these and other laws—of acoustic value, stage construction, and an actor's mastery of his role. The workshop gave two demonstrations in 1922, the first—on August 29th—a closed one at a private high school, and the second—on October 16th—an open one at the House of Publishing. The first was a particular success, Nikritin noted: "One of the leaders of what was then the Meierkhol'd Theater, [Ivan] Aksenov, as well as the poet [Aleksei] Kruchenykh, the drama critic L'vov, and many others, talked of the beginning of a new theater." Following the "failure" of its first true performance—the production of *A Conspiracy of Fools* in May 1923—the workshop moved to the Central Institute of Labor, headed by Aleksei Gastev. In the spring of 1924, the workshop offered a partial performance of a script of its own devising, *1924-yi god (The Year 1924)*. S. Nikritin, "Masterskaia Proektsionnogo teatra," 1925?, Central State Archive for Literature and Art, Moscow, f. 2717, op. 1, ed. khr. 21, l. 48–56.

30. Triaskin, "Vospominaniia," p. 43.

31. Ibid., p. 40.

32. Ibid., p. 41. Another newspaper review described the event thus:

Another pretentious extravaganza . . . no, sorry, one more "production feat" . . . which featured drums being beaten in the galleries, while below, six young people in skullcaps said, "A E I O U," shuffled their feet, dragged a staircase, parallel bars, and other movable supports from place to place, and in between declaimed verses by Mariengof . . . The theater is called Projectionist. People in the know explain that this means the "projection" or a prophecy of the ideal theater of the future.

This "theater of the future" is a great thing. (A. Lezhnev, "Zagovor durakov. Masterskaia Proektsionnogo teatra," Rabochaia gazeta 113 {1923}, Central State Archive for Literature and Art, Moscow, f. 2717, op. 1, ed. khr. 95, l. 6).

33. Miuller, "Mashinopoklonniki," translation of review of October 13, 1923, Central State Archive for Literature and Art, Moscow, f. 2717, op. 1, ed. khr. 95, l. 9–10.

34. Ibid., l. 8.

35. Red'ko did not join Ost, and in 1927—after a trip to northern Russia, where he completed a number of figurative works in illustration of Luminism—went to France. Triaskin left Moscow for a teaching position in Kiev in 1926.

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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Kazimir Malevich
*Red Square (Painterly Realism: Peasant Woman
in Two Dimensions)*, 1915
State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg

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