
VLADIMIR TATLIN

The Work Ahead of Us, 1920

Born Kharkov, 1885; died Moscow, 1953. 1902–10: attended the Penza Art School spasmodically; traveled as a sailor to the Near and Middle East; 1910: entered the Moscow Institute of Painting, Sculpture, and Architecture; 1911: with Mikhail Le-Dantiyu et al., designed costumes for the play *Emperor Maximilian and His Son Adolphe* in St. Petersburg; close to the Union of Youth; 1913: visited Paris, where he met Picasso; on return to Russia began to work on his reliefs; 1913–14: worked closely with Aleksei Grishchenko, Lyubov Popova, Nadezhda Udaltsova, and Aleksandr Vesnin; 1914: first one-man exhibition; 1912–16: contributed to the "Donkey's Tail," "Union of Youth," "Tramway V," "O.10," "Shop," and other exhibitions; 1918: head of IZO Narkompros [Visual Arts Section of Narkompros] in Moscow; 1919: head of the Painting Department at Svomas, Moscow; then moved to Svomas, Petrograd; 1919–20: worked on the model of his Monument for the Third International; 1921: close to Inkhuk; in December helped to found the Petrograd IKhK; 1925–27: headed the Department of Theater and Cinema, Kiev; 1930–32: designed and exhibited his Letatlin glider; 1930s and 1940s: worked on theater decor and turned back to easel painting.

The text of this piece, "Nasha predstoyashchaya rabota," is from *Ezhednevnyi byulleten VIII-go sezda sovetov* [Daily Bulletin of the Eighth Congress of Soviets] (Moscow), no. 13, January 1, 1921, p. 11. Cosignatories with Tatlin were Tevel Shapiro, Iosif Meerzon, and P. Vinogradov, who assisted him on the project. The text, which was dated December 31, 1920, has been translated into English in the catalogue to the exhibition *Vladimir Tatlin* (Stockholm, 1968), p. 51 [bibl. 230], and except for the notes, which have been added, this translation is reproduced here with the kind permission of the Moderna Museet, Stockholm. The text acts as a commentary on the model of Tatlin's Monument for the Third International, which had been transferred from Petrograd and erected in Moscow on the occasion of the Eighth Congress of Soviets, in December 1920; in general terms, the text provides an elucidation of, and justification for, the construction of such an innovative and provocative project. Tatlin's Monument (or Tower), like Lissitzky's Prouns (see p. 151), signalized a new constructive conception by presenting an "organic synthesis of architectural, sculptural, and painterly principles" [bibl. R444, p. 1] and, of course, provided an essential stimulus to the development of a constructivist architecture. While Tatlin's Monument stood at a crossroads between the purist art of his reliefs and counterreliefs and the practical application of his ideas to productional design (clothes, furniture, his domestic stove, etc.), the interest in the object as such

remained, at least among his fellow artists and critics: Aleksandra Exter and Ignatii Nivinsky, for example, used counterreliefs in their decorations for the "First Agricultural and Handicraft-Industrial Exhibition," in Moscow in 1923, and in December 1925 GAKhN (see p. 196ff.) organized a lecture and discussion entitled "On the Counterrelief." Tatlin himself, however, became convinced of the need for art to be utilitarian and functional, a view that was at least implicit in the closing lines of the present text and was emphasized very clearly in his essay "Art Out into Technology" of 1932 [in bibl. 230, pp. 75-76].

The foundation on which our work in plastic art—our craft—rested was not homogeneous, and every connection between painting, sculpture and architecture had been lost: the result was individualism, i.e. the expression of purely personal habits and tastes; while the artists, in their approach to the material, degraded it to a sort of distortion in relation to one or another field of plastic art. In the best event, artists thus decorated the walls of private houses (individual nests) and left behind a succession of "Yaroslav Railway Stations" ¹ and a variety of now ridiculous forms.

What happened from the social aspect in 1917 was realized in our work as pictorial artists in 1914, ² when "materials, volume and construction" were accepted as our foundations.

We declare our distrust of the eye, and place our sensual impressions under control.

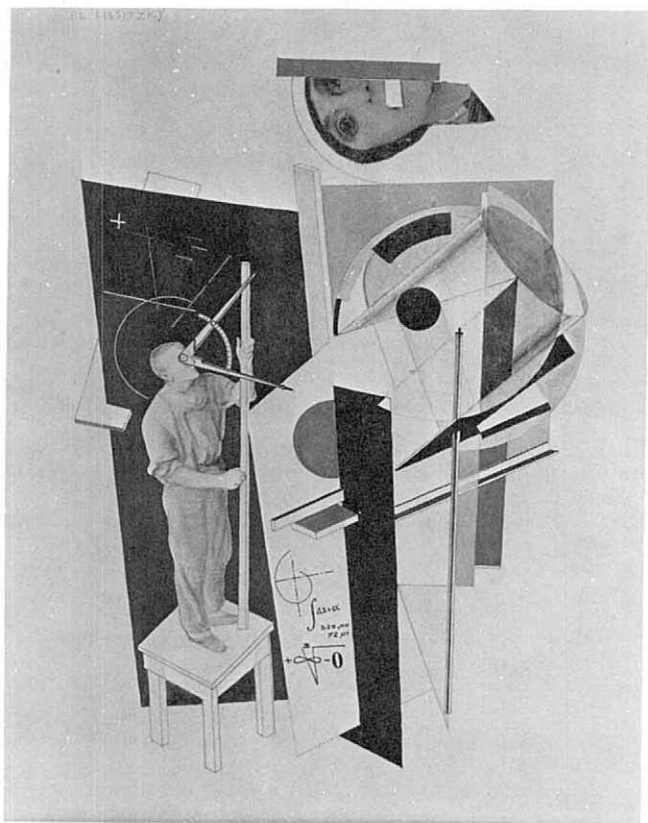
In 1915 ³ an exhibition of material models on the laboratory scale was held in Moscow (an exhibition of reliefs and contre-reliefs). An exhibition held in 1917 ⁴ presented a number of examples of material combinations, which were the results of more complicated investigations into the use of material in itself, and what this leads to: movement, tension, and a mutual relationship between.

This investigation of material, volume and construction made it possible for us in 1918, in an artistic form, to begin to combine materials like iron and glass, the materials of modern Classicism, comparable in their severity with the marble of antiquity.

In this way an opportunity emerges of uniting purely artistic forms with utilitarian intentions. An example is the project for a monument to the Third International ⁵ (exhibited at the Eighth Congress).

The results of this are models which stimulate us to inventions in our work of creating a new world, and which call upon the producers to exercise control over the forms encountered in our new everyday life.

ARTE (PRODUÇÃO)
P/ PRODUTORES



El Lissitzky: *Tatlin at Work on the Third International*, ca. 1920. Pencil, gouache, photomontage, 33 x 24.5 cm. Collection Grosvenor Gallery, London.



Vladimir Tatlin: *Model for Letatlin* (without sheathing fabric), 1932. Letatlin was a one-man glider designed by Tatlin and so called from the combination of the verb *letat* [to fly] and Tatlin. Tatlin was not the only Soviet artist to think in terms of aerospace engineering; Petr Miturich, for example, designed an "undulating dirigible" in 1931. Photograph courtesy private collector, Moscow.

NAUM GABO and
ANTON PEVSNER
The Realistic Manifesto, 1920

Gabo—Pseudonym of Naum Neemia Pevzner. Born Briansk, 1890. Brother of Anton. 1910–11: graduated from the Kursk Gymnasium; entered the medical faculty of Munich University; 1912: transferred to the Polytechnic Engineering School, Munich; 1914: traveled to Scandinavia; 1915: first constructions; 1917: returned to Russia; 1922: left Russia for Berlin; 1926: with Anton designed the decor for Sergei Diaghilev's production of *La Chatte*; 1946: settled in United States; lives in Connecticut.

Pevsner—Real name Noton Pevzner. Born Orel, 1886; died Paris, 1962. Brother of Naum. 1902–1909: attended the Kiev Art School; influence of Isaak Levitan and Mikhail Vrubel; 1909–11: attended the St. Petersburg Academy; 1911–14: worked in Paris; contact with Alexander Archipenko and Amedeo Modigliani; 1914–15: in

- 1919; on February 2, 1921, the academy was reinstated. See Introduction for other details.
3. In 1918, both collections were nationalized and became the First and Second Museums of New Western Painting; in 1923 both were amalgamated into a single Museum of New Western Painting; in the early 1930s many of the museum's works were transferred to the Hermitage in Leningrad, and in 1948 all the holdings were distributed between the Hermitage and the Pushkin Museum in Moscow. The idea of establishing a museum of modern painting was not new in Russia: as early as 1909, a group of artists and critics including Ivan Bilibin, Nikolai Reikh, and Vselovod Meierkhold had favored such a proposal. See Filippov, "Gallereya sovremennykh russkikh khudozhnikov" [A Gallery of Modern Russian Artists] in bibl. R43, no. 4/6, 1909, p. 45; the Union of Youth had also supported the idea—see Shkolnik, "Muzei sovremennoi russkoi zhivopisi" [A Museum of Modern Russian Painting] in bibl. R339, no. 1, 1912, pp. 18–20.

LUNACHARSKY, pp. 190–96

1. Vsevobuch [Vseobshchee voennoe obuchenie—General Military Instruction] was an inclusive title for all bodies concerned with military training of workers. By a decree of 1918, all Soviet citizens, from schoolchildren to the middle-aged, were to receive military instruction.
2. The Second Congress of the Third International opened in Petrograd June 19, 1920, and June 27 was declared a public holiday in honor of it; a parade and procession with representatives of Vsevobuch took place in Moscow.
3. On June 19, 1920, a mass dramatization, *Toward the World Commune*, took place at the former Stock Exchange in Petrograd; Natan Altman was the artistic designer.
4. *The Twelve*, written in 1918, was perhaps Aleksandr Blok's greatest poetic achievement. Ostensibly it was a description of the revolutionary force represented by twelve Red Guards.
5. Lunacharsky was present at Vladimir Mayakovsky's first private reading of the play *Mystery-Bouffe*, September 27, 1918. He was impressed with the work and promoted its production at the Theater of Musical Drama in November of that year. It was taken off after three days and was revived only with Vselovod Meierkhold's production of it in May 1921.
6. I.e., New Economic Policy. The period of NEP (1921–29) was marked by a partial return to a capitalist economic system.
7. This simple yet spacious monument in Petrograd to the victims of the February Revolution was designed by Lev Rudnev in 1917–19 and was landscaped later by Ivan Fomin.
8. In the early 1920s several designs were submitted for a Moscow Palace of Labor—among them one by the Vesnin brothers—but none was executed.

TATLIN, pp. 205–206

1. The reference is to the Yaroslavl Station, Moscow, built in 1903–1904 after a design by Fedor Shekhtel. Its frieze and majolica details were designed by artists who had been close to Abramtsevo, including Konstantin Korovin. Similarly, several moderate artists, including Aleksandr Benois, submitted interior designs for the adjacent Kazan Station between 1914 and 1917 (designed by Aleksei Shchusev, built 1913–26).
2. From May 10 to 14, 1914, Tatlin held a one-man show of synthetic-static compositions in his studio.
3. Documents indicate that the only Moscow exhibition of 1915 to which Tatlin contributed some relief collages (hardly "on the laboratory scale") was the "Exhibition of Painting, 1915" (ex catalogue), although he may have opened his studio to the public at the same time (March–May). In March 1915, he exhibited seven painterly reliefs at "Tramway V," in Petrograd, and in December 1915/January 1916, he contributed reliefs and counterreliefs to "0.10," also in Petrograd. According to bibl. R447, Tatlin showed counterreliefs at a Moscow "sbornaya" [mixed] exhibition in 1915 but this, presumably, was a reference to the "Exhibition . . . 1915."
4. No contribution by Tatlin to a 1917 exhibition has been recorded. It is possible that he means the "Shop" of 1916, which he organized and to which he sent seven reliefs and counterreliefs.

5. I.e., Tatlin's Tower. Iosif Meerzon and Tevel Shapiro helped Tatlin build the first model in Petersburg; P. Vinogradov joined them when the Tower was re-erected in Moscow.

GABO and PEVSNER, pp. 208-14

1. The measurement used in the original Russian is *arshin* (= 28 inches).
2. The measurement used in the original Russian is *puđ* (= 36 lbs.).

GAN, pp. 214-25

1. For explanation of Old Believers, see no. 5 to Shevchenko, p. 301.

ARVATOV, pp. 225-30

1. As early as 1918 the State Porcelain Factory had produced items decorated by Natan Altman. In the early 1920s cups, saucers, plates, and pots were being produced with suprematist designs by Ilya Chashnik and Nikolai Suetin.

PERTSOV, pp. 230-36

1. "Transsense" or "transrational" translates the word *zaum*, a new linguistic medium formulated by Aleksei Kruchenykh [see bibl. R284, R295]. Kazimir Malevich, Olga Rozanova, Varvara Stepanova, et al. also wrote *zaum* occasionally. *Zaum* lines, for example, occur at the end of Malevich's essay "O poezii" [On Poetry] in bibl. R66, no. 1, 1919, p. 35 [English translation in bibl. 159, vol. 1, 82]. For Rozanova's transrational verse, see bibl. R332.

"First Discussional," pp. 237-43

1. The Constructivist Poets such as Vera Inber, Ilya Selvinsky, and Kornelii Zelinsky were members of the so-called Literary Center of the Constructivists [Literaturnyi tsentr konstruktivistov, or LTsK], founded in Moscow in 1924 [see bibl. R441] A translation of their manifesto appears in bibl. 211, pp. 123-27.
2. Constructivists of the Chamber Theater (Aleksandr Tairov's Kamernyi teatr) included Aleksandra Exter, the Stenberg brothers, Aleksandr Vesnin, and Georgii Yakulov [see bibl. R187].
3. Constructivists who worked for Vselovod Meierkhold's State Higher Theater Workshop in Moscow included Lyubov Popova and Varvara Stepanova; as director of the Workshop, Meierkhold developed his constructivist theory of so-called biomechanics. [For details see bibl. 190, pp. 183-204; bibl. 193, p. 70; R17 (bk. 2), pp. 486-89.]
4. The Central Institute of Labor [Tsentralnyi institut truda, or TsIT], run by Aleksei Gastev in Moscow, acted as a laboratory for the analysis of the "rhythmic rotation of work" and aspired to create a machine man, an artist of labor. Among the institute's members were the critic Viktor Pertsov and the artist Aleksandr Tyshler [see bibl. 42, pp. 206-14].

BRİK, pp. 244-49

1. For details of Inkhuk see Introduction and bibl. R16, pp. 126-43. Lyubov Popova, Aleksandr Rodchenko, and Varvara Stepanova had turned to productional art soon after the conclusive exhibition "5 × 5 = 25," in September 1921 [see bibl. R446]. Popova and Stepanova became particularly interested in textile design, as Stepanova demonstrated in her lecture "Kostyum segodnyashnego dnya—prozodezhda" [Today's Dress Is Productional Clothing], delivered at Inkhuk in the spring of 1923 and published in *Lef* [bibl. R463]. Rodchenko turned to poster art, typography, and photography; Anton Lavinsky to poster art and small-scale construction projects; Gustav Klutskis and Sergei Senkin also favored poster art and typography and later were active in the October group [see pp. 273ff. and bibl. R421, R500].

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of the Avant-Garde
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1902-1934**

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