

We affirm *that the tone of a substance, i.e. its light-absorbing material body is its only pictorial reality.*

2. We renounce *in a line, its descriptive value; in real life there are no descriptive lines, description is an accidental trace of a man on things, it is not bound up with the essential life and constant structure of the body. Descriptiveness is an element of graphic illustration and decoration.*

We affirm *the line only as a direction of the static forces and their rhythm in objects.*

3. We renounce *volume as a pictorial and plastic form of space; one cannot measure space in volumes as one cannot measure liquid in yards: look at our space . . . what is it if not one continuous depth?*

We affirm *depth as the only pictorial and plastic form of space.*

4. We renounce *in sculpture, the mass as a sculptural element.*

*It is known to every engineer that the static forces of a solid body and its material strength do not depend on the quantity of the mass . . . example a rail, a T-beam, etc.*

*But you sculptors of all shades and directions, you still adhere to the age-old prejudice that you cannot free the volume of mass. Here (in this exhibition) we take four planes and we construct with them the same volume as of four tons of mass.*

*Thus we bring back to sculpture the line as a direction and in it we affirm depth as the one form of space.*

5. We renounce *the thousand-year-old delusion in art that held the static rhythms as the only elements of the plastic and pictorial arts.*

We affirm *in these arts a new element the kinetic rhythms as the basic forms of our perception of real time.*

These are the five fundamental principles of our work and our constructive technique.

Today we proclaim our words to you people. In the squares and on the streets we are placing our work convinced that art must not remain a sanctuary for the idle, a consolation for the weary, and a justification for the lazy. Art should attend us everywhere that life flows and acts . . . at the bench, at the table, at work, at rest, at play; on working days and holidays . . . at home and on the road . . . in order that the flame to live should not extinguish in mankind.

We do not look for justification, neither in the past nor in the future.

Nobody can tell us what the future is and what utensils does one eat it with.

Not to lie about the future is impossible and one can lie about it at will.

We assert that the shouts about the future are for us the same as the tears about the past: a renovated day-dream of the romantics.

A monkish delirium of the heavenly kingdom of the old attired in contemporary clothes.

He who is busy today with the morrow is busy doing nothing.

And he who tomorrow will bring us nothing of what he has done today is of no use for the future.

Today is the deed.

We will account for it tomorrow.

The past we are leaving behind as carrion.

The future we leave to the fortune-tellers.

We take the present day.

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VLADIMIR TATLIN, T. SHAPIRO, I. MEYERZON, and  
PAVEL VINOGRADOV:  
The Work Ahead of Us (1920)

*Vladimir Evgrafovich Tatlin was born in 1885, either in Kharkov or in Moscow. He exhibited paintings with a number of Russian artistic groups in the years 1911-13 and was closely associated with the painter Mikhail Larionov. But his attitudes were transformed in the course of a visit to Paris in 1913, when he was able to see the cubist reliefs*

Dated Moscow, December 31, 1920. This translation by Troels Andersen *et al.* was first published in *Vladimir Tatlin* (exhibition catalogue, Stockholm: Moderna Museet, July-September 1968) and is reprinted here with permission.

of Picasso. On his return he began to work on the series of "counter-reliefs" that were the foundation of his constructivist style.

With the Revolution Tatlin's leading position among progressive artists was soon recognized. In 1918 he became head of the Visual Arts Department of Narkompros (Commissariat for People's Enlightenment) and in the following year instructor at the Free Studios in Petrograd. In December 1920, in connection with the meeting of the Eighth Soviet Congress, he went to Moscow to reconstruct his model for a Monument to the Third International, first exhibited in Petrograd on November 8 for the anniversary of the Revolution. It was in Moscow that he produced this short manifesto, which was also signed by two students from the Free Studios who were assisting him—I. Meyerzon and T. Shapiro—and by Pavel Vinogradov, who likewise took part in the re-erection. The title commemorates the founding of the Third (Communist) International, or Comintern, in 1919.

After 1920, Tatlin himself turned increasingly to the task of achieving "control over the forms encountered in our new everyday life," as anticipated in this document. His last major project was the Letatlin flying machine described in "Art Out into Technology" (see p. 170). He died in Moscow in 1953.

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" and a variety of now ridiculous forms.

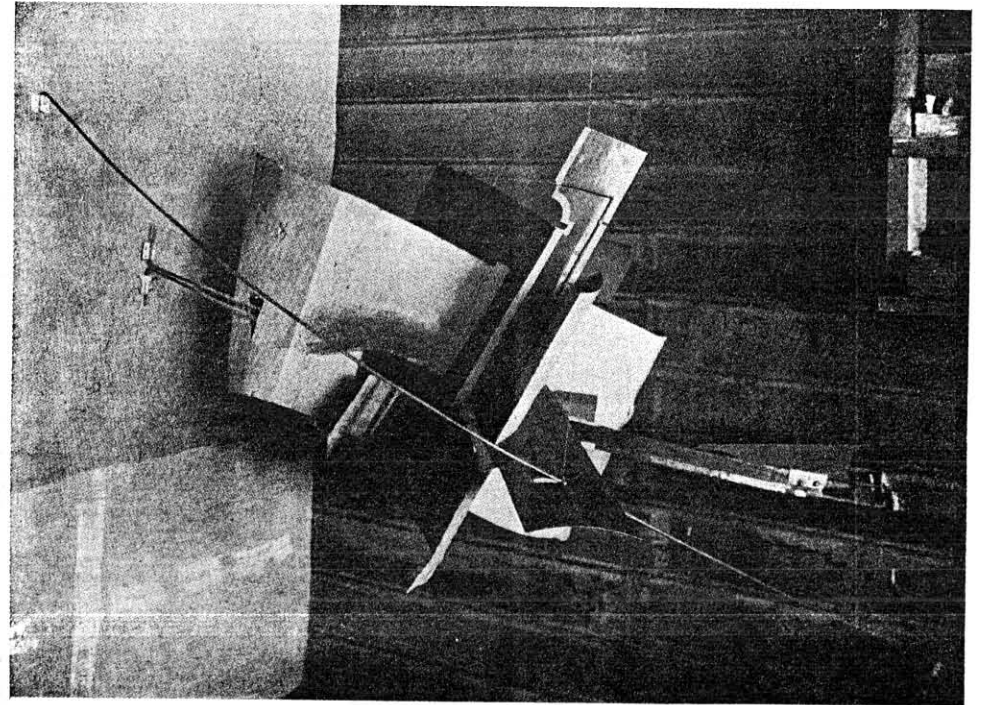
What happened from the social aspect in 1917 was realized in our work as pictorial artists in 1914, when "materials, volume and construction" were accepted as our foundation.

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

In 1915 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 presented a number of examples of material

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Vladimir Tatlin: *Corner Relief, Suspended Type*, 1914–15. Tatlin visited Picasso in Paris in 1913 and saw his cubist reliefs incorporating actual objects. His own counterreliefs and corner reliefs were developed over the next two years and exhibited at the "Tram V" show in Petrograd in 1915, where they created a great scandal.



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 [them].

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 (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.

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### NIKOLAI PUNIN: Tatlin's Tower (1920)

*Nikolai Punin was one of the first critics to champion the "organized" methods of constructivism as opposed to the "bomb-throwing" of the early futurists. In the Petrograd journal Iskusstvo kommuny (Art of the Commune), January 1919, he was already championing the notion that the principle of utility and the principle of construction were not in conflict, and that modern beauty was entirely dependent upon their reconciliation. In the last number of the magazine (April 1919),*

*From Veshch/Gegenstand/Objet (Berlin), no. 1-2, March-April 1922; the text dates from 1920. This translation and all other translations by John Bowl were made especially for this volume.*

*however, he prophesied the end of art as a separate discipline, which would inevitably follow such developments in the theory of aesthetics.*

*Punin was aware of the development of Tatlin's model for the Monument to the Third International from its early stages. It was indeed only in the planning stage when he wrote his first article on it in Iskusstvo kommuny, March 9, 1919. Punin claimed that the project showed "in what direction the artist is to work, when he has grown tired of heroes and busts." In his view, Tatlin was "the most forceful and clear-sighted master of our age" (translation by Andersen, Tatlin [exhibition catalogue], pp. 56-57).*

*The passage reprinted here first appeared in a pamphlet on the monument published in 1920. Lissitzky was no doubt eager to feature this symbol of the new Soviet art in the first issue of Veshch/Gegenstand/Objet, which appeared in Berlin in March-April 1922.*

In 1919 the Visual Arts Department of the Commissariat for People's Enlightenment commissioned the artist V. E. Tatlin to work out a project for a Monument to the Third International. The artist, Tatlin, immediately set to work and made a model.

The basic idea of the monument took shape on the basis of an organic synthesis of architectural, sculptural, and painterly principles and was to have afforded a new type of monumental construction uniting creative and utilitarian forms. In accordance with this idea, the model of the monument is composed of three large glass spaces elevated by a complex system of vertical pivots and spirals. These spaces are located one above the other and are enclosed in different, harmonically linked forms. Utilizing mechanisms of a special type, they can move at different speeds. The lower space, which has the form of a cube, moves on its axis at a speed of one revolution per year and is intended for official purposes. Here conferences of the International and sessions of international congresses and of other large official assemblies can take place. The next space, in the form of a pyramid, revolves on its axis at a speed of one revolution per month and is intended for executive purposes (the executive commissariat of the International, the secretariat, and other administrative/executive organs). Finally, the upper cylinder, revolving at a speed of one revolution per day, is intended for centers of an informational type: an information bureau, a newspaper, offices for public proclamations, pamphlets, and

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The names of those who have contributed translations to this collection are mentioned elsewhere. It may, however, be necessary to mention that those texts in a foreign language that already existed in English versions have, for the most part, been reproduced without substantial change. In some cases, the version itself has the status of a historical document as a result of the time and circumstances of its publication. In other cases, slight emendations have been made to secure greater fidelity to the original.

It is perhaps important to emphasize that the primary aim of these translations has been to remain faithful to the distinctive phraseology of the original texts, and that some of the more opaque passages are therefore condemned to remain opaque. The constructivists worked on language and through language; their writings formed an integral feature of their program. But clarity and elegance of expression neither were nor could have been their ultimate aim in all circumstances.

Stephen Bann

Canterbury, November 1971

# Contents

Acknowledgments	vii
List of Illustrations	xiii
Brief Chronology	xv
Preface: Constructivism and the New Man	xix
Introduction: Constructivism and Constructive Art in the Twentieth Century	xxv

## I. Constructivism in Russia: 1920–23

NAUM GABO and ANTOINE PEVSNER: The Realistic Manifesto (1920)	3
VLADIMIR TATLIN, T. SHAPIRO, I. MEYERZON, and PAVEL VINO- GRADOV: The Work Ahead of Us (1920)	11
NIKOLAI PUNIN: Tatlin's Tower (1920)	14
Program of the Productivist Group (1920)	18
<b>From Art in Production (1921)</b>	21
A. FILIPPOV: Production Art	22
A. TOPORKOV: Technological and Artistic Form	26
ALEXEI GAN: From <i>Constructivism</i> (1922)	32
BORIS ARVATOV: From <i>Art and Class</i> (1923)	43
	ix