

WE ARE PRIMITIVES IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY.

And while the whole of society experiences a supreme crisis and while its art remains flabby and hysterical, we are filled with the greatest enthusiasm and creativity. The attacks of the orthodox critics, who obviously no longer believe in what they themselves are defending, the taunts of the crowd, only increase our strength and energy tenfold; conscious of the grandeur of our tasks and knowing that the path we have chosen is the correct one, we are governed by a profound belief in our work, surrounded, as we are, by unbelievers.

STATEMENTS FROM THE CATALOGUE OF THE "TENTH STATE EXHIBITION: NONOBJECTIVE CREATION AND SUPREMATISM," 1919

The texts of the pieces that follow are from the catalogue of "X Gosudarstvennaya vystavka. Bespredmetnoe tvorchestvo i suprematizm" (Moscow, 1919) [bibl. R358; the texts are reprinted in bibl. R16, pp. 110-17; extracts from Malevich's statement are translated into English in bibl. 45, pp. 282-84; the catalogue name list is reprinted in bibl. R152, p. 43]. The "Tenth State Exhibition" opened in January 1919 in Moscow. The nine contributors, in addition to those mentioned here, included Natalya Davydova and Aleksandr Vesnin, neither of whom contributed statements. Two hundred twenty works were shown, all purporting to be abstract. Although this was one of the last major collective avant-garde exhibitions, its influence was considerable, for example, inspiring El Lissitzky to create his first Prouns (see p. 151-53). The tone of most of the statements, with their emphasis on analysis rather than on synthesis, demonstrated a fundamental deviation from Malevich's more intuitive, individualistic conception of abstract art; moreover, the linear and architectonic qualities of the works themselves pointed to the imminent concern with construction and constructivism, at least on the part of Aleksandr Rodchenko, Varvara Stepanova, and Aleksandr Vesnin. The precise, mathematical formulation of the pictorial art, favored especially by Lyubov Popova, was indicative of the general trend toward formalism in literary and artistic evaluation—which was supported by such critics as

Nikolai Punin (see pp. 170ff.) and developed within the framework of Inkhuk especially during 1920–22.

VARVARA STEPANOVA ¹
 Concerning My Graphics
 at the Exhibition

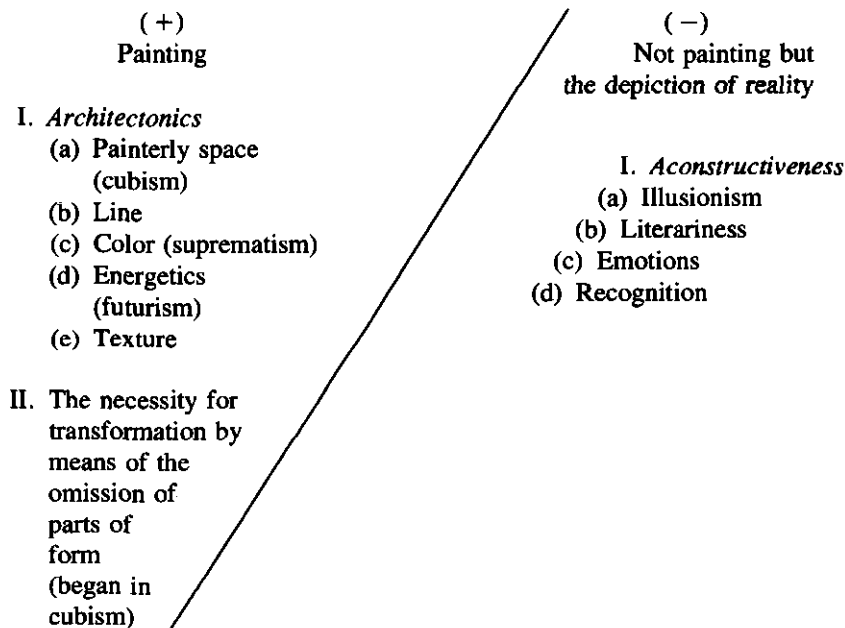
Born Kovno, 1894; died Moscow, 1958. Studied at the Kazan Art School, where she met Aleksandr Rodchenko, whom she married subsequently; 1912: moved to Moscow; studied under Konstantin Yuon; 1913–14: worked at the Stroganov Art School; gave private lessons; 1914: contributed to the Moscow Salon; 1920–25: closely involved with IZO Narkompros; member of Inkhuk; contributed to “5 × 5 = 25”; with Lyubov Popova and Rodchenko entered the First State Textile Print Factory, Moscow, as a designer; designed costumes for Aleksandr Sukhovo-Kobylin’s *Death of Tarelkin*, produced by Vselovod Meierkhold; 1923–28: closely associated with *Lef* and *Novyi lef*; 1924: professor in the Textile Faculty at Vkhutemas; late 1920s and 1930s: worked on typography, book design, posters.

I am linking the new movement of nonobjective poetry—sounds and letters—with a painterly perception that instills a new and vital visual impression into the sound of poetry. I am breaking up the dead monotony of interconnected printed letters by means of painterly graphics, and I am advancing toward a new kind of artistic creation.

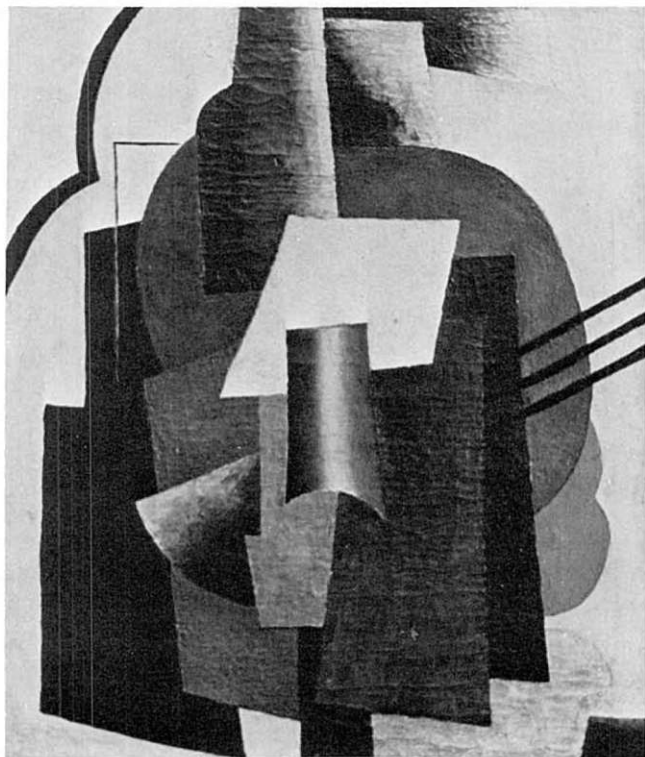
On the other hand, by reproducing the nonobjective poetry of the two books *Zigra ar* and *Rtny khomle* ² by means of painterly graphics, I am introducing sound as a new quality in graphic painting, and hence I am increasing its quantitative potentials (i.e., of graphics).

LYUBOV POPOVA

Born near Moscow, 1889; died Moscow, 1924. 1907–1908: attended the studio of Stanislav Zhukovsky in Moscow; 1912–13: worked in Paris in the studios of Henri Le Fauconnier and Jean Metzinger; met Nadezhda Udaltsova there; 1913: returned to Russia; close to Vladimir Tatlin, Udaltsova, and Aleksandr Vesnin; 1915–16: contributed to “Tramway V,” “0.10,” and the “Shop”; 1918: joined the faculty of Svomas/Vkhutemas; 1921: member of Inkhuk; gave up easel painting; 1922: did the set and costume designs for Vselovod Meierkhod’s production of Fernand Crommelinck’s *Magnanimous Cuckold*; 1923–24: worked at the First State Textile Print Factory, Moscow.



Construction in painting = the sum of the energy of its parts.



Lyubov Popova: *Painterly Architectonics*, 1917-18. Oil on canvas, 105.5 x 90 cm. Private collection, Moscow.

Surface is fixed but forms are volumetrical.

Line as color and as the vestige of a transverse plane participates in, and directs the forces of, construction.

Color participates in energetics by its weight.

Energetics = direction of volumes + planes and lines or their vestiges + all colors.

Texture is the content of painterly surfaces.

Form is not of equal value throughout its whole sequence. The artistic consciousness must select those elements indispensable to a painterly context, in which case all that is superfluous and of no artistic value must be omitted.

Hence depiction of the concrete—artistically neither deformed nor transformed—cannot be a subject of painting.

Images of “painterly,” and not “figurative,” values are the aim of the present painting.

OLGA ROZANOVA (1918)
Extracts from Articles ¹

For biography see p. 102.

We propose to liberate painting from its subservience to the ready-made forms of reality and to make it first and foremost a creative, not a reproductive, art.

The aesthetic value of an abstract picture lies in the completeness of its painterly content.

The *obtrusiveness of concrete reality* has hampered the artist's work, and as a result, common sense has triumphed over visions fancy free; but visions fainthearted have created unprincipled works of art—the mongrels of contradictory world views.

—*Supremus* magazine, no. 1 ²

ALEKSANDR RODCHENKO
Rodchenko's System

Born St. Petersburg, 1891; died Moscow, 1956. 1910–14: attended the Kazan Art School, where he met Varvara Stepanova, whom he married; 1916: contributed to

**Russian Art
of the Avant-Garde
Theory and Criticism
1902-1934**

**Edited and Translated
by John E. Bowlt**

THE VIKING PRESS NEW YORK

Copyright © 1976 by John Bowlt
All rights reserved
First published in 1976 by The Viking Press, Inc.
625 Madison Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10022
Published simultaneously in Canada by
The Macmillan Company of Canada Limited

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CATALOGING IN PUBLICATION DATA

Main entry under title:

Russian art of the avant-garde.

(The Documents of 20th-century art)

Bibliography: p.

Includes index.

1. Art, Russian—History—Collected works. 2. Art, Modern—20th century—Russia—
Collected works. I. Bowlt, John E. II. Series.

N6988.R84 709'.47 73-17687

ISBN 0-670-61257-X

Printed in U.S.A.

Acknowledgments: Harvard University Press and Lund Humphries Publishers Ltd.: "Realistic Manifesto" from *Gabo* by Naum Gabo. Copyright © 1957 by Lund Humphries. Reprinted by permission. Thames and Hudson Ltd.: "Suprematism in World Reconstruction, 1920" by El Lissitzky.

ILYA ZDANEVICH and MIKHAIL LARIONOV: Why We Paint Ourselves: A Futurist Manifesto, 1913	79
---	----

III. Nonobjective Art

MIKHAIL LARIONOV and NATALYA GONCHAROVA: Rayonists and Futurists: A Manifesto, 1913	87
MIKHAIL LARIONOV: Rayonist Painting, 1913	91
MIKHAIL LARIONOV: Pictorial Rayonism, 1914	100
OLGA ROZANOVA: The Bases of the New Creation and the Reasons Why It Is Misunderstood, 1913	102

Suprematist Statements, 1915:

IVAN PUNI and KSENIYA BOGUSLAVSKAYA	112
KAZIMIR MALEVICH	113
IVAN KLYUN	114
MIKHAIL MENKOV	114
KAZIMIR MALEVICH: <i>From Cubism and Futurism to Suprematism: The New Painterly Realism</i> , 1915	116
IVAN KLYUN: Primitives of the Twentieth Century, 1915	136

Statements from the Catalogue of the "Tenth State Exhibition: Nonobjective Creation and Suprematism," 1919:

VARVARA STEPANOVA: Concerning My Graphics at the Exhibition	139
VARVARA STEPANOVA: Nonobjective Creation	141
IVAN KLYUN: Color Art	142
KAZIMIR MALEVICH: Suprematism	143
MIKHAIL MENKOV	145
LYUBOV POPOVA	146
OLGA ROZANOVA: Extracts from Articles	148
ALEKSANDR RODCHENKO: Rodchenko's System	148
EL LISSITZKY: Suprematism in World Reconstruction, 1920	151

IV. The Revolution and Art

NATAN ALTMAN: "Futurism" and Proletarian Art, 1918	161
KOMFUT: Program Declaration, 1919	164
BORIS KUSHNER: "The Divine Work of Art" (Polemics), 1919	166
NIKOLAI PUNIN: Cycle of Lectures [Extracts], 1919	170
ALEKSANDR BOGDANOV: The Proletarian and Art, 1918	176
ALEKSANDR BOGDANOV: The Paths of Proletarian Creation, 1920	178