

KANDINSKY, MALEVICH AND GABO:

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THREE ARTISTS
DURING THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION

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INTRODUCTION

The period in Russia dated from 1905 to 1921 was a time of immense dramatic, radical, social, artistic and political change. The revolution of 1917 witnessed the emergence of a new and rigorous regime and the beginning of a Communist State. The Bolshevik government encouraged the active participation of artists in building the new socialist state. The avant-garde readily joined and from their activity emerged the Constructivist ideology which espoused the idea of art merging with industrial production and utilitarian design. It rejected the romantic belief that the personality and mood of the artist should be the predominant value and guidelines in an artistic creation. It was a period of great experiments and exchanges of ideas in art. The Constructivists called for the abolition of an outlined aestheticism, belonging to the culture of capitalist society.

There were however many artists, while being influenced by the revolution and the artistic experiments, did not fully agree with the "debasement" of art in favour of utilitarianism. Kandinsky, Gabo and Malevich are three such artists whose work form the bases of this thesis.

The social changes which exploded in the revolution of 1917 which can be traced back to the liberation of the serfs in 1861, will be examined. Side by side with these social changes there were dramatic artistic changes, starting with the development of the Wanderers movement in 1863. The artistic development of each artist, Kandinsky, Gabo and Malevich, is looked at in the context of political and artistic developments: after October 1917 artistic life underwent a transformation. All three artists contributed significantly to this total re-organisation in different capacities. New art schools and workshops were organised, museums were

opened to bring the new revolutionary art to the public. The majority of artists were involved in revolutionary propaganda projects, designing banners, decorating streets, printing and distributing literature.

There emerged a division among the artistic avant garde into two main groups, the Productivists under Tatlin and Rodchenko and the Constructivists under Gabo and Pevsner. It is important to note that Gabo did not refer to himself as a 'Constructivist', if a title had to be applied it was 'Constructor' as Tatlin and his group called themselves 'Constructivists'. No distinction between Gabo and Tatlin was made in the West originally as the work was primarily seen in formal terms.

This division resulted in the departure from Russia by 1921 of both Kandinsky and Gabo. In 1919 Malevich had opened 'Unovis' (Affirmation of the New), in one of the provinces, 'Unovis' was closed in 1922 and its founder moved to Petrograd. Moscow had at this time become the centre of artistic activity and was dominated by Constructivist art groups. Malevich, whose Suprematism has become as strong a movement as Constructivism, never disregarded his viewpoint that art was an independent form of thought as opposed to a strict working method devoid of emotion.

Given the social and art historical background, it is possible to evaluate the significant effects and influences of the pre-revolutionary period, through the revolution to the post-revolutionary years, on the development of the work of Kandinsky, Gabo and Malevich.

CHAPTER ONE

It was not until after the revolution of 1917 and ensuing civil war, that there was any radical re-examination of the function of art and there was little support for artistic activity in Russia. There had been major developments in the previous decade which could almost be said to have prophesised the social, cultural and economic revolution. From the late 1800s a widespread unrest had been in evidence in every facet of life. To understand some of the developments of these early years, it is necessary to have some knowledge of the social and political background in which these developments took place.

From 1861 onwards the state of Russia underwent major changes. Czar Alexander II liberated 21,000,000 bonded serfs at this time and made all such peasants free citizens with the right to own land and freed them from their obligations of service and dues to the gentry. However, the system employed in granting emancipation had created a politically dangerous proletariat. Freed serfs left the land to go and work in the growing industries in the towns. It was in the towns that they became a cohesive and politically conscious working class that was rapidly gaining strength. By the 1870s a campaign of terrorism was started against Czarist officialdom. Alexander II was assassinated in 1881, yet little changed under Alexander III and by 1904 the situation of the poor had deteriorated even more. One of the persistent beliefs among the poor was that the Czar was being misled by his advisors and that if only he was aware of their sufferings that he would meet their needs. An eccentric but persuasive priest, Father Gapon, who had established a representative organisation among factory workers, decided to lead his followers to the Winter Palace to petition the Czar personally. The authorities took fright and the

procession carrying icons and portraits and singing religious and nationalist songs was brutally shot down by government troops. Bloody Sunday resulted in widespread strikes and riots. The famous mutiny of the Potemkin which was re-enacted in a film by Eisenstein in 1925, occurred at this time. Order was eventually restored but only by the wholesale execution of peasants and the burning of villages.

Artists, shocked and horrified by this massive show of force, printed and distributed illegal literature. Furthermore, they began to question the old traditions and look for new answers. The social and political instability of these years encouraged experimental and innovatory art, as the rigid institutions of Czarist Russia eroded a new found freedom began to flourish.

Previous to this art had taken a backseat in Russian life. Artists worked mostly in colonies and were usually supported by rich families, work was done by and large to academy standards and expectations. In 1870 the patronage of the Czar was replaced by millionaire merchants but this change had little effect on the type of work being produced. Sculpture was not encouraged by the Church as the tradition was of peasant crafts. The Church saw no need for sculptural work other than decorative wood carvings and icons. (This will be discussed in Chapter II).

Because of Russia's enormous size and its relative isolation from the rest of Europe, many trends which originated in Europe took quite a while to penetrate into the Russian art world. Russian impressionism had started to develop in the early 1860s and although it was represented by such gifted painters as Vrubel, Korovin and Serov it, as in the rest of Europe, met with little acceptance. Korovin was one of the first Russian artists to introduce such European trends.

In 1901 he was appointed as professor at the Moscow college of art and almost all the avant garde of the first decade were his pupils, Larionov, Tatlin, Goncharova, Mashkov, Konchalovsky and Falk as well as many of the futurist poets who started out as painters, the Burliuk brothers, Kruchenikh and Mayakovsky.

In 1863 there had been a major development in the art world. Fourteen art students rebelled against the aesthetic and academic structures of the Imperial Academy of Arts at St. Petersburg. The new group called themselves "The Wanderers", the name being derived from the fact that they put their ideals into practice by taking travelling exhibitions throughout the countryside.

They rejected Western culture and sought to create a new national culture based on the Russian peasant and the long neglected nationalistic artistic traditions. They sought to justify their activity by making their art "useful" to society. Although by no means all socially relevant their artworks were topical, intelligible and co-jointly opposed to academic art. By the 1880s, however, a sharp division was evident. The founder members of the society had at this time either died or stopped painting. Some convinced of the rightness of their principles had developed little either thematically or formally. There were others who, while exhibiting with the Wanderers, shared few of the original principles, were dissatisfied by the realist domination and were seeking to escape from the impasse with which Russian art was confronted. Korovin was one of these new generation of Wanderers. This new generation of artists shared renewed interest in the expressive and formal qualities of peasant craftwork. There were willing to encourage the indigenous traditions of Russian culture, for example icon painting, wood carving, folk tales, etc. and to focus attention on Russian theatre, dance and opera, many of them became associates of the "World of

Art" groups. The "World of Art" group was a cultural organisation which aimed to accelerate the evolutions of Russian art.

"World of Art" was a title applied to a cultural 'club' of artists, writers, musicians and esthetes, and to a journal issued by them. One of its more prominent members once wrote "I consider that by 'The World of Art' we should understand not this, that or the other in isolation, but everything together, or rather a kind of collective which lived its own distinctive life, which had its own interests and aims, which tried to influence society in various ways and to awaken in society the desired response to art" (1).

The "World of Art" was not a formal society and had no definitive list of members, many of its "associates" were also connected with other groups.

The "World of Art" exhibitions of which there were seven separate sessions arranged between 1891 and 1906 were landmarks in the development of 20th century Russian art, they served as platforms on which both Russian and Western conservative and progressive artists came together. However, these exhibitions diminished in effectiveness as after the third exhibition in 1900 the group selected a permanent body of exhibiting members. So the exhibition from that time onwards ceased to be international and representative of every school. Both Larionov and Goncharova made their debut at the 1906 exhibition. They were to become the leaders of the avant garde during the next few years.

By 1907 Larionov headed a group of painters who were exploring new plastic formulations. He had been among the first Russian painters to be drawn to Cezanne, and together with another painter, Lentulov, organised in 1910 a



no 1 'St Nicholas with the Deesis and Saints' (1153)

group of so-called Russian Cezannists who later formed the 'Knave of Diamonds' Society.

Larionov's enthusiasm however for Russian folk art, icons, popular woodcuts, toys and Goncharova's particular interest in ancient Russian painting, forced them to break with the 'Knave of Diamonds' whom they accused of favouring the West. This interest in traditional Russian folk art was widespread among the emerging avant garde at the beginning of the century. Russian icons were being restored and exhibited and there was a renewed interest in wood-block prints and in textile design.

The previous history of Russian art was predominantly the history of icon painting. The revival of interest in this form of art came at a very important time for many young artists and its relevance cannot be overlooked.

FOOTNOTES

- (1) The Silver-Age: Russian Art of the Early 20th Century and the World of Art Group, John E. Bowlt



no 2 'St Nicholas with Scenes from his Life' (1380)

CHAPTER TWO

Many aspects of Russian folk art have played an important role in the development of art in Russia. There are relatively few relics of antiquity left probably because they were almost all made from wood. Whatever is preserved does not go back much further than the christian era, but it shows continuous unchanging traditions which persist right through to modern times. All that is known of secular art in early Russian history is concerned essentially with its folk art and craftwork, there has been little evidence found of any other kind of secular art such as paintings or sculpture even after the christian era. From the beginning of Christianity, Russian ecclesiastical art was dominated by religious and aesthetic concepts brought in from the Byzantine Empire. Icons, which seem to have made a very important impact on the Russian avant garde of the 20th century, were originally imported from Constantinople and Greek architects and painters were sent for, to build the churches and paint the frescos and to train Russian artists in the proper style.

From the time of Peter the Great's reforms to the beginning of this century little interest or concern was shown in Russian icons even within the Church. Most of the ancient images were covered with metal mountings, age-old layers of paint and candlesoot making them impossible to be seen in their original state.

The rapid changes of style which occurred in Western European art from the beginning of the christian era did not infiltrate into Russian culture. Neither the 'Gothic' nor the 'Renaissance' left any impression on Russia. It was only slightly touched by the European Baroque and that was very late, except for the brief pseudo-classical fashion brought in by Peter the



no 3 'Our Lady Elfusa with the Deesis and Saints' (1470)

Great, not one of the periods which were so decisive for European art left any decisive influence on Russian art. From Christianity onwards artists, in particular painters, followed a strict method of working, each master left a set of patterns which the Church blessed and instituted. These patterns were the tracings of silhouettes of figures and their position in an icon or fresco and were rigidly adhered to. The other elements in a composition were left free for the individual imagination and artistic ability of the artist who executed it. Artists readily accepted without question the limits placed on them by the Church. There, in fact, did not appear to the artists to be any limits, as the basic idealism of an artist's faith was identical with that of the Church. According to the essence of that faith art, as with religion, was to be as far as possible detached from the crude realism of the material world. An artist did not need to look for inspiration to the imitation of the material aspects of life or the physical aspects of nature. Art, like the Church, found the source of its inspiration in an inner world. Master artists found the source for their compositions in their own aesthetic impulses and there, as in folk art, every line in an icon, every shape and colour was transformed from a detail into a theme.

Malevich's writings show an almost identical principle. His train of thought followed parallel to that of those early icon painters, he showed this when he wrote:

"The artist can be a creator only when the forms in his picture have nothing in common with nature. For art is the ability to construct ... Colour and texture in painting are ends in themselves. They are the essence of painting but this essence has always been destroyed by the subject." (1)

Another important concept which was as relevant to icon painters down



no 4 The Kogan Virgin (1630)

through the ages as it was to the avant garde of the early part of this century is the attitude to visual art which is particular to Russia, that being that a work of art was first and foremost a social phenomenon. Art was to have no elite. It was as relevant to a peasant as it was to the Czar himself. It was valid for a social purpose, spiritual as well as material, spiritual in that icons performed the function of a link between man and his beliefs. It had to function not only in a church or a private home but icons were frequently carried about from house to house and village to village for occasions of every kind.

A work of art, therefore, was not meant to appeal only to a limited group of educated people. Since the abstract and utilitarian concepts were common in both religious and secular life and were readily understood by all, the link between the artist and the working people was very close. It is this link between the artists and the working classes that the constructivists most advocated.

With Peter the Great came the decline of ecclesiastical art, Western European naturalistic ideas were brought in. Portraiture and descriptive painting, which were traditionally alien to Russian art, began to develop. The art which was now produced, although not radically different from the rest of Europe, was often quantitatively much poorer.

One of the first people to show interest in icons in modern time was Goethe, a German painter/critic/journalist, at the turn of the 18th century. His interest may well have been the spark that started a widespread cleaning and restoration process throughout Russia, and after hundreds of years what appeared as dark or even black images emerged as paintings of clear and luminous colour. By the early 20th century a vast



no 5 Saints Boris and Gleb on Horseback (1377)

number of icons had been restored to their original splendour. Not only was interest awoken in Russia itself but when Matisse visited Russia in 1911 he said that he believed that a study of the theory and technique of Byzantine art was of immense value to the modern art movement. Vrubel (1856 - 1910) who influenced Gabo more than any other Russian painter, was fascinated by the treatment of drapery and by the Byzantine method of building up colour from dark to light. Goncharova, Malevich and Kandinsky were impressed by the use of pure strongly contrasting primary colours. Tatlin also owes much to the techniques of icon painting especially to icons which were encrusted with semi-precious stones and metal fringing. In "0-10 The Last Futurist Exhibition" held in 1915 Malevich hung his 'Black Square' in a similar fashion to icons, high up in a corner. In 1913 there was a major exhibition of restored icons held in Moscow, most of the avant garde would have seen it. There can be little doubt that the tradition of icon painting was of value and inspiration to developments starting around that time.

FOOTNOTES

- (1) Malevich, Suprematism and Revolution in Russian Art, Larissa Zhardova.

CHAPTER THREE

Kandinsky who was older than most of the Russian avant garde was born near Moscow in 1866. In 1871 his family moved to Odessa but he made annual visits with his father to Moscow until 1885. The following year he moved to Moscow to study law and economics. Although Kandinsky had shown a keen interest in painting and especially colour from an early age, it was not until 1889 when he was sent by the university to the Vologda province to study peasant law that he became really interested in art. He was very impressed by the folk art and by their use of colour and pattern. That same year he travelled to Paris to see the Exposition Universelle, an expansive fair with presentations from all over the world. There he cannot but have been impressed by the vivacity and enthusiasm being expressed from every aspect of life.

He got a job teaching in the faculty of law in the Moscow University but gave it up two years later. In 1896 Kandinsky went to Munich to study painting, he was thirty years old. By 1900 he was studying under Franz von Stuck. He participated in the annual exhibition of the Moscow Association of Artists and showed with them yearly until 1908. As early as 1904 when Mussatov and Somov and Benois were still popular in Russia, Kandinsky began working on his colour theories. He believed colour was endowed with powers of metamorphosis, and through the correct use and emphasis of colour and tone one could produce any mood or thought one wanted. Soon afterwards Kandinsky turned his attention to "line". An important influence here was a book by H. van de Velde called 'Listenprediglen a hymn to the virtue of line'. Van de Velde's ideas, Kandinsky found, were very much in accord with his own and Kandinsky was later to write 'Point and Line to Plane'. By this time, Kasimir Malevich had arrived in Moscow. In 1897 he had entered the Kiev School of Art but left again in 1900. His



fig 1 Harlequin and Death, Konstantin Somov
(1907)



fig 2 Les Spectateurs, Kandinsky (1908)

arrival in Moscow in 1905 coincided with the December Revolution in which he took a lively interest. Malevich was born near Kiev in 1878, he received little formal education and gained most of his knowledge through avid reading. His writings do bear the signs of his unsystematic education in their confused thought and language. Malevich's simple background may well have been an additional barrier between himself and Kandinsky who was a well-educated man of sophistication and cosmopolitan upbringing.

These two artists nonetheless have much in common and are both fundamentally related to the symbolist movement which had a strong following in the "World of Art" and which did eventually get underway in 1892 and continued right through the early 1900s, it was a very intricate and prolific movement. It is important to know that Kandinsky belongs to this world of art generation and this fact in many ways explains the lack of sympathy for his ideas among the next generation of his fellow countrymen. Although there was little contact between Kandinsky and the original members of the "World of Art" movement, his painting and drawing from pre 1911 bear a very strong resemblance to the style of such people as Konstantin Somov who as well as painting intriguing portraits did several paintings on mythology (fig. 1), his work was decorative rather than illustrative, behind all the gay colours and exotic erotic play there is an over-shadow of doom, which is also evident in Kandinsky's falling, humbling cities and small figures, in boats or on horseback fleeing (fig. 2). Kandinsky's work also bears similarities to some of the 'World of Art' poets. Kandinsky was also very close spiritually to the composer/painter Cicerlions who worked in St. Petersburg from 1906 until he died in 1911. In 1912 he had a section at the 'World of Art' exhibition entirely devoted to his work. Kandinsky's attitude and that of the Blaue Reiter as a group was essentially symbolist, they shared a common concern for expression and

intuition and believed in the eventual union of all the arts.

In Munich in the early years of this century, there were several different groups following different trends and with opposing avant gardisms, Kandinsky did not sympathise with any of them. In 1901 he drew together a number of artists under the title of Phalanx. What united them was that they were all anxious to attack and rid themselves of the bastions of traditional art. However Phalanx did not succeed, there were in all three exhibitions and by 1906 Kandinsky had returned to using old themes.

He, at this stage, had travelled extensively in Europe. In 1909 along with Jawlensky, Kubin Erbsloh, Kandinsky founded a new group, the 'Neue Kunstlerverengung Munchen'. Their first exhibition was held at Tannhauser's Modern Galerie. The artists who were invited to contribute were an eclectic mix, Picasso, Braque, Ronault, Vlaminck and Franz Marc were among some of the exhibitors. However it was not clear what these artists had in common. The catalogue proclaimed that they were searching for new forms in art, new methods of expressing ideas, feelings and sensations. The catalogue for the second exhibition was much more explicit and more directly reflected Kandinsky's own views of an "inner necessity". At this time Kandinsky was writing 'Concerning the Spiritual in Art'. In Russia Malevich had begun working independently from 1908. Previous to this his work reflected several different styles, at an early stage he was influenced by the Wanderers Mussatov and Korovin, and by Impressionism and Post-Impressionism. He studied enthusiastically Cezanne, Gauguin, Van Gogh, Matisse, Picasso and Bonnard. He also worked in a style close to the Symbolism of Art Nouveau.

Around 1910, Malevich began making large gouache paintings based on peasant themes. In 1912 he showed a number of works at the first union of youth



fig 3 Peasants in Church, Malevich (1909)



fig 4

Woman with Buckets, Malevich

exhibition, these paintings which had had started working on as early as 1909 mark the next step in his development from the decorative primitive period towards auto-futurism. His paintings were beginning to become geometrical while still retaining a figurative content. 'Peasants in Church' 1909 (fig. 3), the figures in this huddled group of scarfed women, have lost any separate identity of form face or gesture, only a cylindrical pattern of shapes emerges whose solidity is emphasised here and there by contrasting colours. By 1910 the rough blurred outline of the figure became in 'Woman with Buckets' (fig. 4) a thin brushline and the figure becomes very clearly delineated. 'Hay Making' of 1911 continues this geometricisation of the figure and relates it to the background where the figure and haystack have the same overall beehive shape.

During 1912 and 1913 Malevich continued to work in this cubo futurist style. Gradually from a mechanised figure like his 'Woodcutter' and a geometrically rhythmical world such as his 'Morning in the Country after Rain' (fig. 5) a world created purely out of mechanically dynamic forces is reached in 'Woman with Buckets'. By this stage Malevich had surpassed both the analytical cubists and even Leger in his logical approach towards abstract picture construction (Malevich had often been compared with the French artist Fernand Leger). Malevich's cubo futurist works are in a number of ways analogous to Leger's works of the same period. 'Nus dans un Paysage' (1909) and 'La femme en Bleu' (1912) (fig. 6), 'L'escalier' (1914) (fig. 7) probably comes closest to Malevich's ideas and has a number of characteristics in common with the 'Knife Grinder' (fig. 8) of 1912.

These were emotionally intensely busy times for Malevich. He was an active member of the Russian cubo-futurist movement, in which poets and



fig 5

Morning in the Country after Rain,

Malevich, (1913)



fig 6 La femme en bleu, Leger
(1912)

painters worked side by side, which took shape about 1910 and flourished during the next five years. "There is hardly any other time in history when poetry and painting were as closely linked as when the so-called Cubo-Futurism arose in Russia" wrote Nikolai Khardzhiev who wrote the extensive book 'Mayakovsky and Painting'.

Cubo-futurism became a general and widely accepted label at the time when both critics and the public put together the paintings of the Russian cubists and the poems of the futurists as they saw both as being equally incomprehensible. This lack of understanding probably stemmed from a new and innovative use of common language. 'Za-um' a word used to describe one type of poetry means 'beyond meaning' or 'without meaning'. Poems were written with a formal emphasis on sound rather than meaning. In the same way, familiar visual objects were broken up and scattered throughout paintings and paint itself became just as important as any kind of content.

Malevich did the designs for futurist manifestos and collections of poetry. He took part in public evening meetings at which the 'new art' was promoted and doubtless caused debate which often turned into personal rows. He also contributed to the organisation and staging of the first productions in the world of the futurists of the Theatre. As the popular artist Rozanova declared in the poster she designed. While all this was going on Malevich of course showed at numerous leftist exhibitions, those of Larionov's group 'The Donkeys Tail', the 'Knave of Diamonds' and the 'Union of Youth'. The Union of Youth was first founded in St. Petersburg in 1909 by Olga Rozanova, Matyushin, Filonov, Markov and some others. It is important to note that the Union of Youth encompassed not only the visual arts, but drama and music as well. The first Union of Youth exhibition was held in March 1910, it was succeeded by a Salon in Odessa. This Salon marked the introduction of the Munich School in Russia, Izbedsky along with Kandinsky



fig 7. 'L-escalier', Leger (1914)

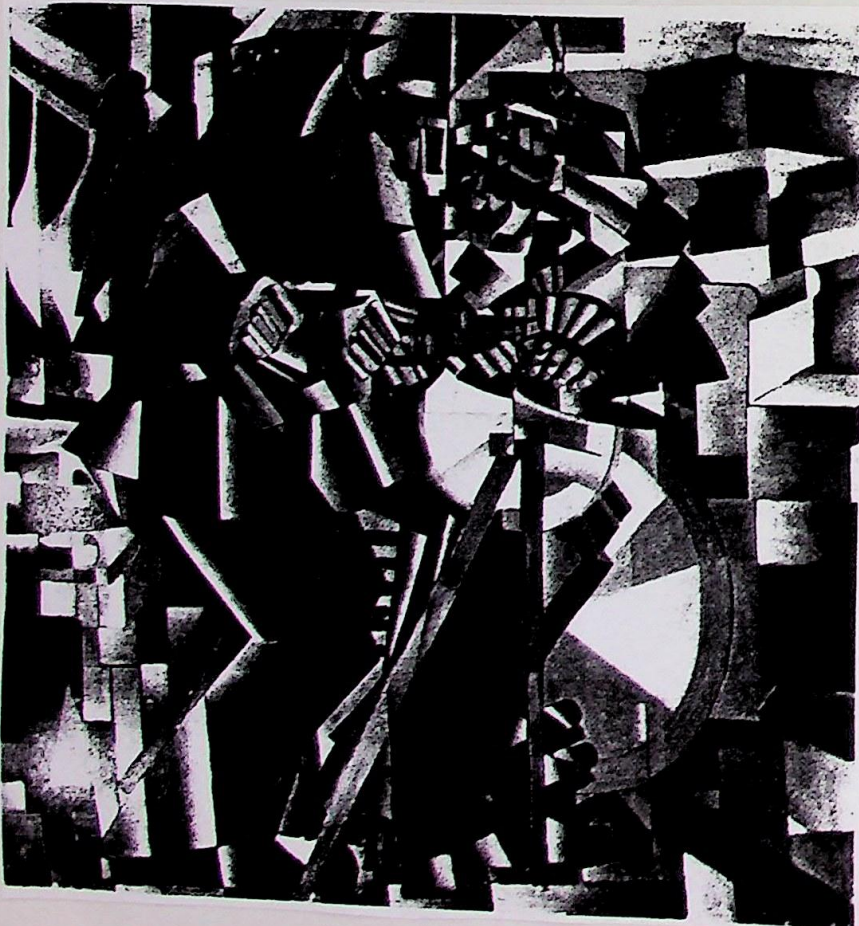


fig 8.

'The Knife Grinder', Malevich
(1912)

and Jawlensky all of the 'Neue Kunstlerverengung' which had been founded in Munich the previous year. This Russian/German group of painters was to become the core of the blaue Reiter movement of 1911, 1912 which included a number of Moscow artists. It was at this Salon that Kandinsky first met the Burliuks and Larionov and Goncharova. It was the first of such exhibitions to which Kandinsky had contributed in Russia, he sent fifty two paintings.

Kandinsky, it must be remembered, is best known because of his activities in Europe, particularly Germany. He was one of the founder members of 'Der Blaue Reiter' which was founded almost by accident at the end of 1911. The Neue Kunstlerverengung refused to exhibit Kandinsky's 'Composition V', so he promptly resigned from the group. He was followed by Franz Marc and together they decided to mount an exhibition of their own. They decided to call themselves 'Der Blaue Reiter' as the colour blue and horses had particular significance for both artists. The Blaue Reiter became a rallying point for practitioners in all spheres of artistic activity. It came to symbolise a total upheaval and a changing of emphasis in art, literature and music. Kandinsky and Marc both believed in the diversity of forms, they stressed a reliance on inner nature at the expense of outward appearance and embellishment. They published a magazine called 'The Blaue Reiter Almanach'. It was produced as a permanent and continuous record of the work and publications of the group and its associates. Contributions covered the widest possible range of issues, everything from early cave paintings to work of masters to scribbles on asylum walls was included. It was during these early years that Kandinsky came to the realisation that objects were detrimental to the trueness of his paintings. He resolved to rid himself of objects in his work but for a while he was not sure what would fill the void that the objects once filled. Eventually the solution

came to him not through any form of calculation or reasoning but through painting itself. Kandinsky gradually eroded his forms removing from them any model or reference to the tangible world, advancing towards what he called the 'new objectivity', the total elimination of realism. No longer did he reduce recognisable forms to abstraction but he took on concepts such as 'The Final Judgement' and created abstract figuration that he felt corresponded to the theme.

In 1913 - 1914 Malevich and several of his comrades although still working on peasant themes were working under the principle so clearly defined by Mayakovsky when he wrote that:

"Nature is no more than a material that the artist can handle as he likes, provided only that he explores the character of life and casts it into forms until then unknown to any but the artist". (1)

Malevich designed both the costumes and the stage set for Matyushin's opera 'Victory over the Sun'. The designs for the costumes are broadly related in style to Malevich's cubo-futurist painting. The surviving sketches for the backdrops, like those for the costumes, show that Malevich was trying to break with familiar decorative conventions. He attempted with great enthusiasm to create a spectacle that was new, fantastic and startling in expression and topicality and so successful and novel were his designs that they dominated the music and drama. It is quite likely that the first inkling of Suprematism appeared in Malevich's designs for 'Victory over the Sun'. One of the backdrops Malevich designed for Scene 1 was conceived as a close-up view of the horizon of the sun seen within the box format, a square within a square which Malevich used for every backdrop. He later traced the development and origin of his famous 'Black Square' (fig. 9) back to this. Malevich was not alone in his ideas on the future of art. His antimimetic stance was closely allied to ideas put forward in 1913 by

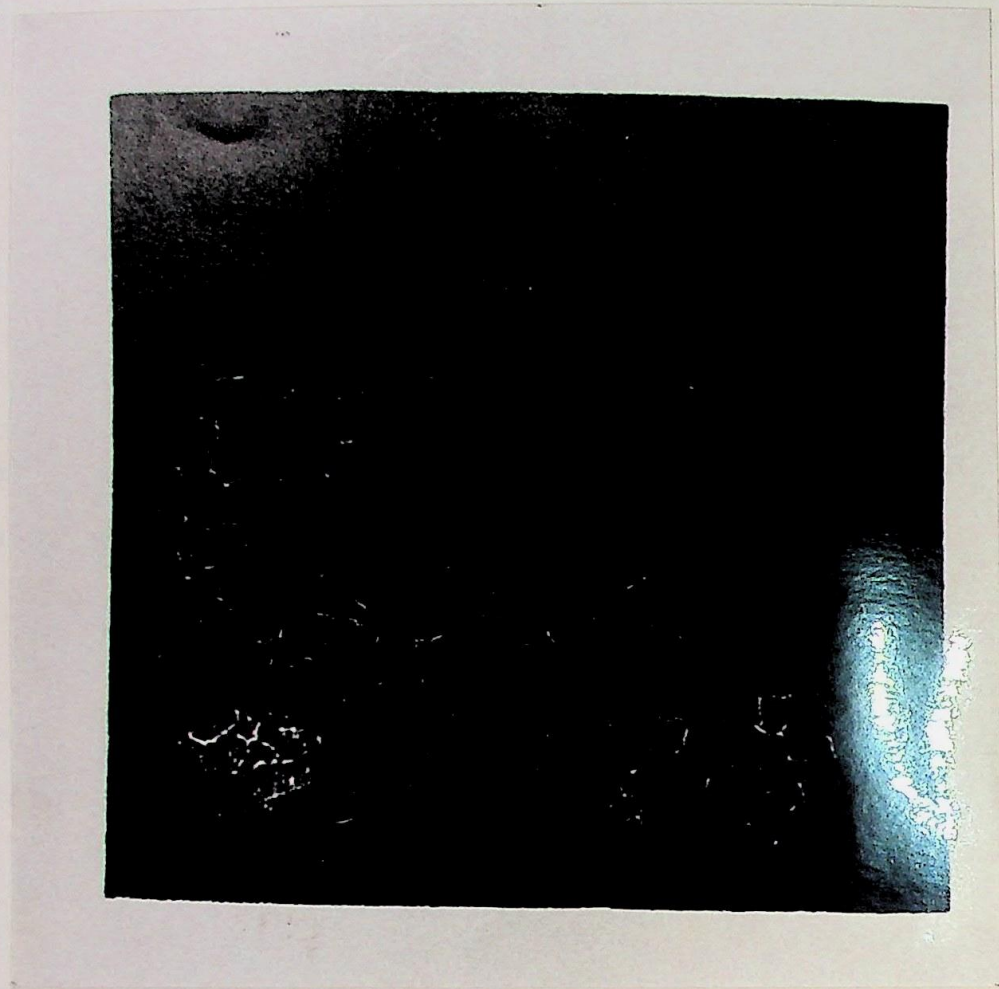


fig 9 Black Square, Malevich (1915)

the Union of Youth artist, Rozanova when she proclaimed:

"The era of the final absolute liberation of the great art of painting from the alien traits of literature and society and everyday life." "Art", she argued, "should be concerned with its own intrinsic properties and should not illustrate superlative content." (2)

Rozanova believed that art needed to be more definitely separated from literature as both painting and literature had become very closely entwined at the time. It was not unusual for someone to study painting and then to become a writer, and several poets exhibited paintings and drawings as well.

When Rozanova said that painting should not have superlative content, she saw that content as being internalised and should refer particularly and indeed solely to form, colour and surface and their inter-relationships. To this end Malevich felt that a painting by Repin or Serov (1890s) might just as well be executed in black and white for all the difference it would make to the narrative content. By contrast Suprematism was the purely painterly art of colour and its intuitive nature based on the supremacy of feeling. Malevich along with Rozanova were the only two avant garde artists at that time not to have been to Paris and therefore it is probably not by chance that their creations were by far the most original.

By 1914 cubism was very much in evidence in Russia. However, as with many movements adapted by the Russian artists, it evolved in a specifically Russian context. This can be seen in Malevich's piece 'An Englishman in Moscow' (fig. 10) and 'Woman beside advertisement pillar' (fig. 11). Though showing technical concerns taken from cubism these paintings were not direct imitations of the French style. Malevich used objects which had

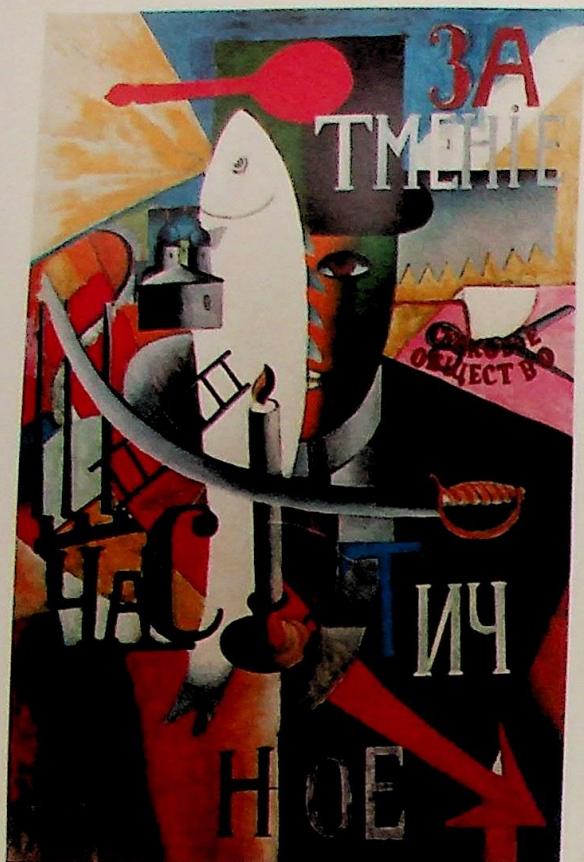


fig 10.

'An Englishman in Moscow', Malevich,
(1914)

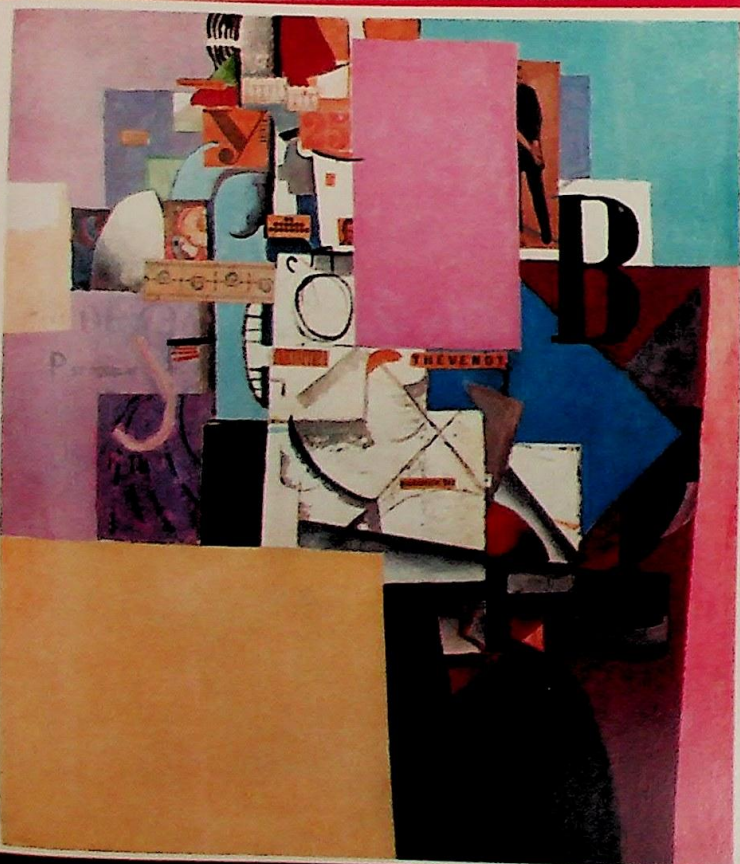


fig 11.

'Woman beside an advertisement pillar,

Malevich (1914-15)

no relevance to anything else in the painting, he used huge lettering, pieces of words and mottoes all superimposed on top of the other. This no sense realism was in fact a visual counterpart to the Za-um (no meaning/beyond meaning) poems of Khlebnikov and Kruchenikh.

Although Malevich seems to have had a clear understanding of what he was doing his writings do not come across quite so clearly yet his ideas remain interesting both because he was the first artist who deliberately founded a school of geometrical abstraction and because his influence has become very widespread.

It is from Kandinsky that Malevich got the word non-objective. By non-objective he meant non-representational abstraction, a world of art devoid of content which imitated or suggested the appearances of the natural world. As far as Malevich was concerned the recognition of nature in a painting undermined the artistry of art. He maintained that realistic representation or indeed representation of any thing obscures the true nature and function of art and that Suprematism is the rediscovery of pure art. Malevich's 'supreme' abstractions appeared for the first time at "0-10 the last futurist exhibition" held in Petrograd in 1915, Malevich showed 39 completely new abstract canvases. It was at "0-10" that Malevich and Tatlin openly split, Tatlin at first refused to exhibit alongside Malevich but eventually agreed on condition that his work would be shown in a separate room to that of Malevich. In the exhibition catalogue none of the works are referred to as "Supremist" Malevich wrote in the catalogue:

"In naming some of these paintings I do not wish to point out what form to seek in them but I wish to indicate that real forms were approached in many cases as the ground for formless painterly masses from which a painterly picture was created quite unrelated to nature." (3).

Malevich on another occasion wrote:

"The artist can be a creator only when the forms in his picture have nothing in common with nature. For art is the ability to construct, not on the inter-relation of form and colour and not on the aesthetic basis of beauty in composition but on the basis of weight, speed and the direction of movement." (4).

'Black Square' headed the list of works. The strongest intellectual influences seem to have come through the ideas of Kulbin, Kandinsky, Matyushin, Kruchenikh, Bergson, Denis and Lipps, in other words from expressionism. Malevich's ready use of P. D. Uspensky's formal vocabulary derives from this orientation and for the same reason he found the aesthetics of both Boccioni and the Puteaux cubists congenial. Through his search for the pure, essential form Malevich found the futurists and cubist idioms too dependent on visual reality to express his views of an invisible one.

Malevich divided Suprematism into three phases, the black-white phase, the colour phase and the white phase. The first two appeared to have existed simultaneously. One of Malevich's observations about futurist painting was that sensations created by futurists could have been produced without colour, in black and white. In other words, phenomena existed which could be experienced visually and which did not involve colouristic sense perception. This was one of the points of departure for Suprematism. Malevich gave a precise description of the relationship between colour and form in Suprematism:

"I could also speak of my own works; in one and the same picture I create the same forms but colour them with different colours. I said that I colour them, in order to underline that in my own pictures I draw a strict

distinction between colour and form, and in the case in point I colour the form with this or that colour not because red or blue corresponds to this or that form but because I paint in colours according to the scale that has arisen in my creative centre. To go further elements of form and colour also formed according to scales which in their turn are created in the process of various dynamic experiences or an aesthetic - artistic action."

(5)

Thus Malevich disassociates himself from the ideas about casual relations between colour and form which Kandinsky had outlined in his 'Concerning the Spiritual in Art' and pursued in his synthetic experiment. Popova's contribution to suprematism was a major one. She abandoned Malevich's mystical allusion to infinite space and placed increased value on the formal properties of surface, shapes or colours, her architectonic compositions from 1916 - 1918 achieve a density and energy through the overlapping of large geometric forms. Kandinsky also used large geometric planes which often serve as a background for smaller forms and his use of diagonals to dynamic effect, seem at least partially indebted to Popova's suprematist compositions. One basic device Kandinsky shared with Popova and Malevich was the placement of forms off-axis to create a disjunction and a sense of movement. This dislocation/relocation of forms was a major feature of the Russian avant garde's anti-traditional approach to composition worked out to emphasise a sense of newness and modernity.

Kandinsky returned to Russia in late 1914 owing to the outbreak of war, he had lived in Munich for sixteen years. With him came other Russian members of Der Blaue Reiter, Chagall, Puni, Altman, Bogoslavskaya, all returned from their long stays abroad in Paris along with Popova and Udaltsova. Whereas art groups all over Europe were broken up by the outbreak of war, in Russia the event served only to unite. Artists felt a common sense of

excitement about their future and the future of art. In February 1915 the futurist exhibition "Tramway V" was held. This exhibition showed the work of several artists recently returned from abroad. Much of the work shown was along the lines of Cubism and Futurism. At "0-10" Malevich issued a manifesto in which he declared:

"Only stupid and uncreative artists protect their art with sincerity, in art truth is needed, not sincerity." (6)

This sentiment is later echoed in the Productivist manifesto issued in 1920.

During the following two years before the outbreak of the Revolution, the younger artists followed enthusiastically the paths laid down by Malevich and Tatlin and exhibited at several exhibitions. Kandinsky did not contribute to either of the two big exhibitions in 1915 but remained working quietly in Moscow.

At this point it is necessary to introduce the Russian artist Gabo, even though he did not return to Russia until March 1917.

Gabo was born in 1890 in the village of Klimovich in south west Russian. When he was seven his family moved to Bryansk where his father owned a metals factory. In the summer of 1900 Gabo's father sent him to Germany to study medicine. However he stayed only two months in Berlin before moving to Munich where he immediately enrolled at the University of Munich to study medicine and subsequently followed courses in organic chemistry, physiology and anatomy. Two years later he abandoned his medical studies and enrolled for courses in civil engineering at the Technische Hochschule, which he followed until the outbreak of the First World War. In 1913 while still pursuing philosophy Gabo registered for two art history classes, Dr.

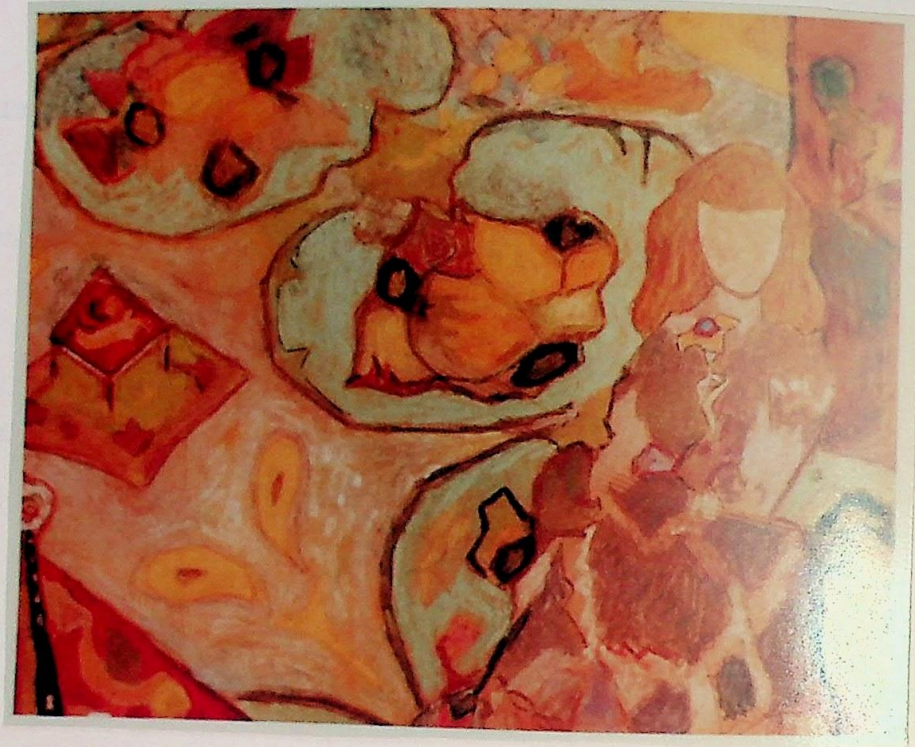


fig 12. 'Christmas', Gabo (1910-1912)

Wolfers on Greek vase painting and Dr. Schermans on Indian art and culture. While in Munich he was also studying art history under Heinrich Wölfflin. It was Wölfflin who encouraged Gabo to go on a walking holiday of Italy. He originally set out to go to Rome but he only got as far as Florence. He was not very impressed by what he saw and told Wölfflin that everything (sculpture and painting) was dead and that it was nature that interested him, not art. Later Gabo said:

"Visiting Italy was like a great shock, seeing Michelangelo and all those works of the Renaissance masters. Something has to be done in sculpture, I felt what it was, but I did not know." (7)

Gabo used to return to Bryansk regularly on holidays. While there in 1911 Gabo spent a lot of time drawing (fig. 12). By 1912 he had begun to draw, paint and sculpt quite intensively. Despite the increasing importance of Gabo's artistic interests there is no evidence that he established any links with the art world of Munich during this time, although Russian artists were quite well known in Munich, in particular Kandinsky. Gabo may have visited the Blaue Reiter exhibitions of 1911 and 1912 which showed work by Kandinsky, Marc, Klee, Larionov, Goncharova and Malevich. He may also have read the Blaue Reiter Almanach. He did in 1913 read Kandinsky's 'Concerning the Spiritual in Art' and he was certainly aware of the artistic theories being debated in Munich, he later wrote:

"Artistic life in Munich was preoccupied with a new idea of art as a deeper more philosophical level - the idea of non-objective art was very seriously discussed." (8)

In April 1914 Gabo returned to Bryansk for a short while where he did some drawings and paintings. He then returned to Munich where he was joined by his brother Alexi. Shortly afterwards war was declared and the brothers left Munich but did not return to Russia as most of their comrades had but went on to Norway. This interlude in Norway proved important for Gabo.



fig 15 Construction en Creux, Gabo (1917)

Here he found the peace and quiet he needed to gather his thoughts and ideas. In the winter of 1915/16 Gabo made his first construction 'Constructed Head No. 1' (fig. 13). Gabo's education in engineering and science played a major role in his development as an artist. From engineering he gained a respect for economy of materials and form and for innovative methods of construction. It is from this point that the premise, basic to his work and later articulated in the Realistic Manifesto, comes and that is that volume and strength are independent of mass. If this first work seems a bit tentative or experimental 'Head No. 2' (fig. 14) which he made in August 1916 is a fully realised statement of theories, beliefs and methods. The honeycomb like structure is more elaborate than the previous year's piece. It is more thought-out, intense and compact. Gabo himself felt that 'Head No. 2' embodied completely his objectives at the time. He also considered 'Head No. 1' only partially successful due in particular to insufficient concavity especially in the lower sections. 'Head No. 2' was made of galvanised iron. It is sometimes compared to the cubist sculptures of Picasso and Archipenko both of whom Gabo would have been familiar with. He may have met Archipenko in Paris as Gabo made several trips there to visit his brother Antoine Peusner. There is little doubt that Gabo was influenced as well as many of his contemporaries by the traditional crafts, in particular the icons with this stylised simplified faces and metal attachments. While still abroad Gabo started work on 'Construction en Creux' (fig. 15).

With the spread of revolutionary events in Russia Gabo's parents requested that all the brothers return home from Norway.

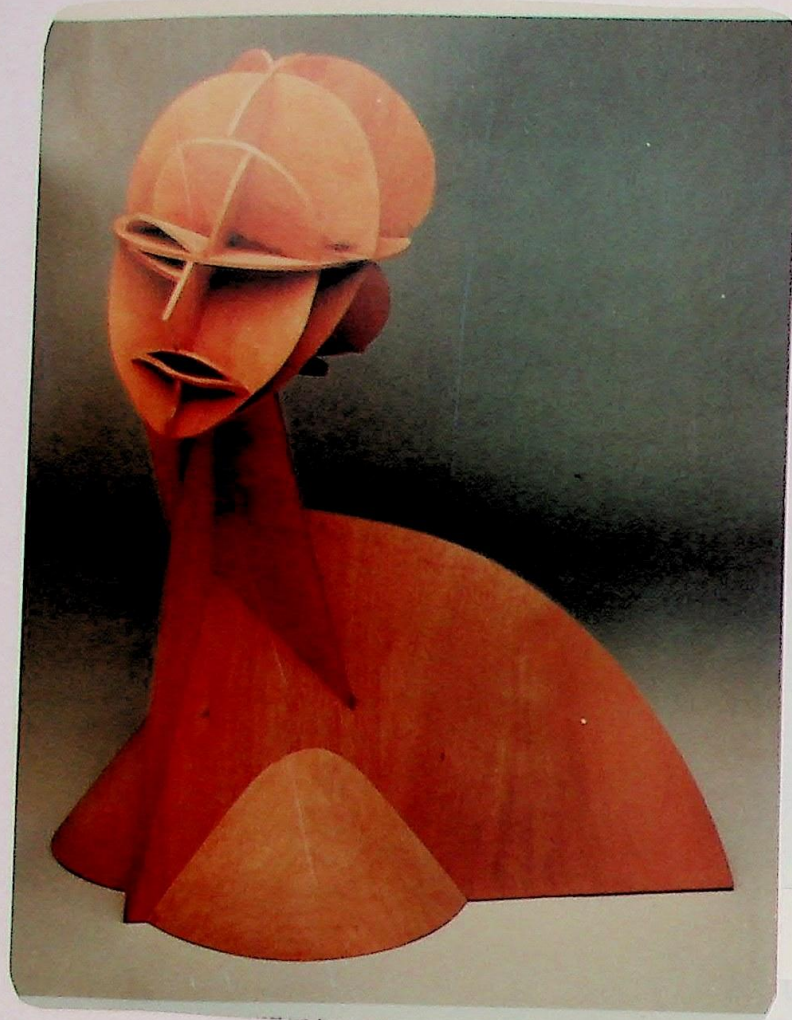


fig 13. 'Constructed Head No 1', Gabo
(1915)



fig 14. 'Constructed Head No 2', Gabo
(1916)

FOOTNOTES

- (1) Malevich - Suprematism and Revolution in Russia, Larissa Zhardova, p. 26
- (2) Ibid, p. 29
- (3) The Russian Experiment in Art, Camilla Grey, p. 161
- (4) Malevich, Suprematism and Revolution in Russian Art, Larissa Zhardova, p.34
- (5) Notebook containing interalia "Notes on Light and Colour", the Archive of Hans von Riesen Breman, copy in the Victoria and Albert Museum London
- (6) The Russian Experiment in Art, Camilla Grey, p. 208
- (7) Naum Gabo - 60 Years of Constructivism, Steven Nash, p.56

CHAPTER FOUR

From 1913 to the beginning of 1925 Russia was in political and social turmoil. During World War I the economic situation had deteriorated rapidly. All the railroads were occupied carrying military supplies. The people suffered severe shortages of food, fuel and housing. Russian troops at the front were loyal but the untrained soldiers behind the lines became disloyal. Many artists were enlisted and went off to fight, those who stayed behind found it very difficult to work as there was little or no materials. By the end of 1916 virtually all educated Russians opposed the Czar. Early in March 1917 the people revolted (the month was February in the old Russian calendar which was replaced in 1918). In Petrograd riots and strikes over shortages of food and coal grew more violent. Troops were called in to halt the uprising but they joined it instead. So did the aristocrats who had turned against the Czar. The parliament which had been set up after the 1905 rebellion established a provisional government consisting of some of the parliament leaders and other public figures. Nicholas II had lost all political support and gave up the throne on 15 March. The Czar and his family were imprisoned until July 1918 when Bolshevik revolutionaries killed them. In July 1917 armed workers and soldiers tried to seize power in Petrograd, they failed and Alexander Kerensky, a Socialist, became premier later that month. Many Russians blamed Kerensky for failures in the war and opposed his socialist views. Artists helped to print posters calling for Kerensky to resign and urging people to demand a new leader.

On 25 October armed workers took over important points in Petrograd. The Bolsheviks formed a new Russian government headed by Lenin. Because art, in particular painting and sculpture, was vigorous at the time of the

Bolshevik revolution it was quickly brought into the service of the new regime. "Art belongs to the people" said Lenin. "It must be understood and liked by them". (Art of the October Revolution, Mikhail Guerman).

Although several artists had left Russia including Larionov and Goncharova, the avant garde took up this new challenge. The widespread experience of the Revolution and the civil war which followed intermittently for the next four years gave artists some of the essential ingredients for the development of a new art, an ideology, a cause. It was the Revolution which once and for all split artists in Russia into two main groups.

All the practising artists were affected by the rebellion, the fighting and the widespread famine. Most of them welcomed the Revolution, seeing it as the opportunity for a new society for mass re-education and the total involvement of art in the development of a new culture based on productivity and industrialisation. As futurists they could not but respond to the appeal of a regime which announced the beginning of a communal way of life in which the artist would be an integrated member of society. Malevich proclaimed:

"Let us seize the world from the hands of nature and build a new world belonging to man himself." (1)

In January of the following year Malevich invited textile workers to his studios to study suprematism and metal workers to study Cubism and Futurism. Malevich believed that Cubism and Futurism were the revolutionary forms of art foreshadowing the revolution in political and economic life in 1917. Malevich, Tatlin, Kandinsky and Rozanova along with some other futurists participated in the activities of the organisation called from the left. Avant garde art was encouraged by the government. It seemed to have shaken off forever the oppression of money and the curse of having to have a market. Artists who had not been able to find

employment as artists previously now found that they had a say in the future of art. In 'IZO' the fine arts department of the People's Commissariat of Education, the revolution was seen as an opportunity to turn mankind's old dreams and visions into reality.

The destiny of artistic life was taken in hand by a new administration whose job was to re-organise artistic development. Two of the most important measures to be carried out were first, the opening of an academy which would be called the 'Institute of Artistic Culture' and, second, the starting up of a chain of museums dedicated to the new pictorial culture. Kandinsky became very involved in the development of several art groups. Malevich who felt that the revolution had provided the long needed reality in which to continue his work became very involved in nationwide propaganda. Gabo, who returned to Russia after the February revolution, later wrote:

"I returned to Russia from Norway only because the revolution had happened. From that peaceful distance the revolution seemed to me to be some kind of heavenly radiance, a token of fate presaging a new life, a new earth, a new homeland, nothing except the revolution could have induced me to interrupt my work. How could I stay away from my homeland when there was such rejoicing there." (2).

Gabo's sentiments echo true for all the artists in Russia. The revolution was the beginning of a new world for art.

Although Kandinsky had been working, painting and drawing, right up to October, 1917, from the revolution until 1919 he did not work on oil paintings at all. There may be several reasons for this, one being the shortage of materials and indeed the shortage of food and fuel. Another



fig 16. 'Red Border', Kandinsky (1919)



fig 17. 'In Grey', Kandinsky (1919)

reason was that of Kandinsky's involvement in an organisational level. Some drawings and watercolours of Kandinsky's dating from 1918 show his concerns during that time. Landscape still predominates but he was also developing the use of the border (fig. 16). His painting had become very dark in comparison to work of his earlier years. In two paintings he made in October just before the revolution there is a huge sense of foreboding, a large dark mask-like image hangs over the landscape. In his watercolours of the immediate post-revolutionary period (1918) Kandinsky continued to use the multiplicity of forms and images derived from his Munich years. In 1919 he painted 'In Grey' (fig. 17). It was his last ambitious effort to resolve the rich complexity of imagery which he had first developed in Munich. His work changed shortly afterwards as he became very influenced by his contemporaries.

For Malevich the few years up to 1920 saw his suprematism reach its peak, it was adapted by many as being the new art. It exerted a deep influence on the whole of the new mass agitation art. Red and black squares, circles and triangles decorated the walls of houses and factories and the boats and trains used for agitation purposes. Suprematism became as important a part in the Agit-art as Tatlin's constructivism. Four government exhibitions directly connected with Suprematism were held in Moscow in 1919. Suprematism was being absorbed into nearly every aspect of life. Also in 1919 embroideries done by peasant women were exhibited in Moscow, they mostly used suprematist patterns. Malevich himself saw the revolution mainly in terms of opportunities it offered to the new art. For him Suprematism was unquestionably "our art". He felt keenly the success of Suprematism and later wrote:

"One must say that the revolutionary period witnessed unprecedented enthusiasm and longing among the young for the new art and this reached an incredibly powerful peak in 1919." (3).



fig 18. 'White on White,' Malevich
(1918)



However, in his preoccupation with what lay in the cosmos and its translation into art, he was to some extent remote from the everyday tasks of creating an effective agit-art. In its adaption to agit-art Suprematism's strongest point was its colour symbolism. As well as working with Suprematism in a practical sense Malevich constantly worked on his theories. He wrote several articles on many themes and ideas, including the establishment of a world collective of artists. However, in 1919 Malevich broke with the rest of the non-objective painters. He had developed along a path which seemed obscure to many of his original followers. In the beginning of 1919 a cycle of State exhibitions was started whose goal was the largest possible presentation of all artistic tendencies in the mainstream of the new culture. The 10th State Exhibition was named "Non-objective Creation and Suprematism". Up until this stage, both had been synonymous. However in 1919 non-objective art was opposed to Suprematism. Malevich sent his 'White on White' series (fig. 18) to this exhibition. In the catalogue to the exhibition Malevich re-emphasised some formulations of his White Manifesto of 1918. The infinity, the ideal domination of white and absolute creation were considered to be superseding of man. He was convinced that he was starting a new dimension in thought. He wrote:

"I have broken the blue shade of colour boundaries and come out into the white. Behind me comrade pilots swim in the whiteness. I have established the semaphore of Suprematism." (4).

At the end of 1919 Malevich had a one-man show in which a conclusion was reached. From 'Impressionism to Suprematism' had 153 works. In this exhibition Malevich announced that Suprematism as a movement had come to an end. Perhaps he felt that he had reached the ultimate in his 'White on White' series. Unlike the productivists Malevich did not feel that 'art'

should be turned into useful objects or produced like factory goods. He believed in a certain spiritual aspect in art. He believed art had its own justifiable unique qualities and was an end in itself.

"The artist can be a creator only when the forms in his picture have nothing in common with nature. For art is the ability to construct not on the inter-relation of form and colour and not on the aesthetic basis of beauty in composition but on the basis of weight, speed and direction of movement." (5).

"Colour and texture in painting are ends in themselves. They are the essence of painting but this essence has always been destroyed by the subject." (6).

In December 1919 Malevich left Moscow to take up a teaching post in a small country town, Vitebsk. Possibly he left because of opposition to his new ideology. Malevich renamed the Vitebsk school 'Unovis'. It is here that he was joined by Lissitsky and Chasnik. He began to evolve his pedagogical method of teaching. Unovis was conceived as a new kind of art school and not merely as a teaching establishment but as a scientific research centre as well as a practical workshop. The thinking behind the Unovis concept was an embracement of the arts in every aspect of life. Unovis developed as a universal school of art at which one studied painting, sculpture, graphics, architecture and applied design all at the same time. This seems to me to be Malevich's first attempt to, in some way, connect Suprematism with reality.

Unlike his contemporaries Gabo seems to have been much less involved in the organisational side of things. He did however become very involved in teaching in an unofficial capacity. His brother Pevsner had an official post as a painting teacher but if any of his pupils wanted to learn sculpture he would send them to Gabo's studio. Gabo evidently identified



fig 19. 'Torso', Gabo, (1918)

with the revolution quite sincerely. He describes himself as "one of the hundreds of artists in Moscow possessed by the new vision of a new life." Gabo took part in some of the avant garde activity that accompanied the revolution. He took part in the decoration of some of the streets and was at most of the meetings and debates which became popular at the time. He was acquainted with Malevich, Tatlin, Rozanova, Udaltsova, Popova, Rodchenko, the Vesnin brothers and Lissitsky. Like them he was inspired by dreams of revolution, of the creation of a new world, a new society and a new art. Gabo met Lenin in Moscow in 1918. Lenin was giving a speech dedicating a site for a new revolutionary statue. It is not known if Gabo ever submitted for public pieces while in Russia, nor to what extent Gabo was involved with 'IZO'. His own description of his work there suggests he was involved in many activities, buying and selling works of art, organising art education programmes and building art schools. He seems however to have had much more involvement in the museums and went around visiting artists and selecting art works which were purchased by the museums and distributed around the country. During the years 1918 - 1921 thirty-six museums were set up and twenty-six more were planned by the time the bureau was disbanded in 1921. When the museum bureau was first set up, it came under a lot of criticism for buying Futurist works instead of work by 'World of Art' artists. Lunacharsky, the commissioner at the time, answered the critics by saying:

"Purchases are being made from all artists but in the first place from those artists who were outlawed during the reign of bourgeois taste and who are therefore not represented in our galleries." (7)

Gabo's own work continued to flourish after he had returned to Russia. His first major piece was a continuation of work he had been doing in Norway. 'Torso' (fig. 19) was the first breakaway from heads and seems much more

confident than his previous work. There is much argument about the dating of Gabo's next pieces as several works have been lost and undocumented. 'Construction en Creux' was completed in 1919 and was made of painted cardboard, also 'Space Construction' in which Gabo uses plastic for the first time. These two pieces mark Gabo's break from naturalistic based pieces into the totally abstract. There is no doubt that Gabo was influenced by the works of Tatlin, Rodchenko, Malevich, E. L. Lissitsky and others. Although Gabo's work in Russia in formal terms falls into the category of non-utilitarian constructions there were important differences between Gabo's constructions with their rather mathematical approach to form and the more material orientated abstract work of Tatlin and his followers. Tatlin's starting point was an interest in the utility of materials and in using materials at the same level as any craft person or even factory worker. Gabo on the other hand started with an image or an idea, with a feeling for space and material, neither Gabo nor his brother Pevsner felt anything for the nihilistic attitude towards art which accompanied the utilitarian and social dimension of Constructivism. This disagreement was spelt out in the 'Realistic Manifesto' which was written on the occasion of an exhibition held on a boulevard in Moscow in August 1920. The main exhibitor was Gabo, and his brother Antoine Pevsner. It was for the opening of this exhibition on 5 August that the Realistic Manifesto was distributed, it was co-signed by his brother Pevsner. In the Realistic Manifesto which was so named because Gabo believed that he was creating art for a new reality, Gabo lays down a proclamation to all artists in every field of activity. He questions the validity of an art style for this new age. He criticises the cubists and the futurists for failing to break the bonds they were allegedly fighting against cubism for not getting any further than analysis, and Futurism for not having a real true understanding of real movement and speed. He states in the Manifesto: "The realisation of our perceptions of the world in the forms of space and



fig 20. 'Kinetic Construction', Gabo (1920)

time is the only aim of our pictorial and plastic art." (8)

He goes on to state five distinct points:

1. "In painting we renounce colour as a pictorial element, colour is the idealised optical surface of objects, an exterior and superficial impression of them. Colour is accidental and it has nothing in common with the innermost essence of a thing. We affirm that the tone of a thing, 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 the 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."
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 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 ... but you sculptors of all shades and directions you still adhere to the age-old prejudice that you cannot free the volumes from the mass."
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

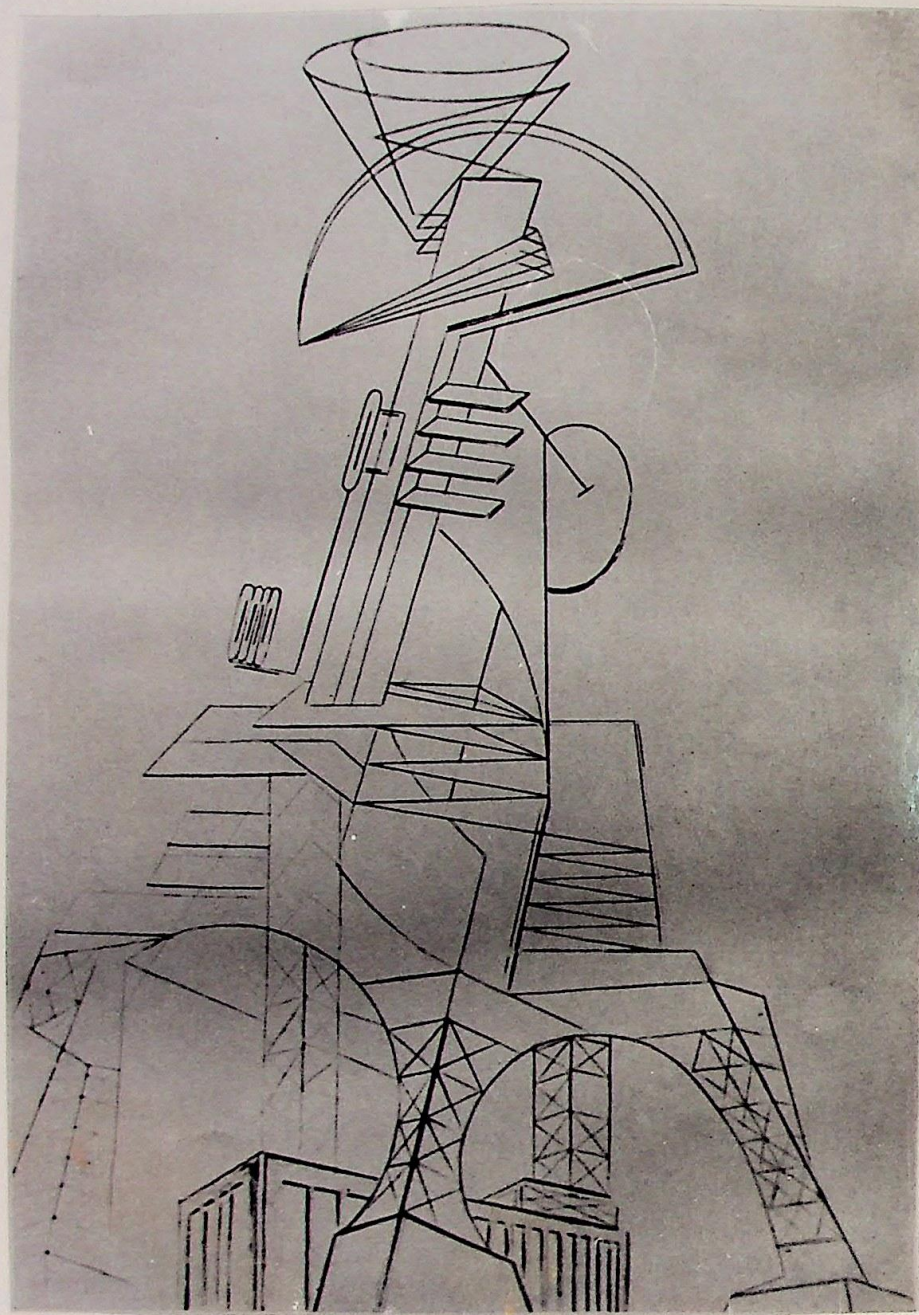


fig 21. 'Project for a Radio Station', Gabo(1920)

forms of our perception of real time."

These are the five fundamental principles that Gabo put down. He also said in his Manifesto that art was for all the people, that it must be put out on the streets and in the squares and not stay as a sanctuary for the idle. "Art should attend us everywhere that life flows and acts ... at the bench, at the table, at work, at rest, at play ... in order that the flame to live should not extinguish in mankind." (9)

In 1920 Gabo built 'Kinetic Construction' (fig. 20) which consisted of a metal rod vibrating by means of a motor. He built it as a visual example of the principle of the Manifesto. He later said he built it to illustrate a point and not as an actual piece.

Several students exhibited as well. It was the only public exhibition of Gabo's work in Russia and drew considerable attention, even internationally. During the exhibition students organised a meeting to discuss the issue 'Where to now?' At this meeting Gabo warned Tatlin and his followers that:

"If you deny the importance of art you will reach a point where the working classes will cut out prints from the newspapers and hang them on the wall and you will have the academicians back." (10)

Later in 1920 Gabo criticises his own design for a tower which he had designed in 1919 (fig. 21), and Tatlin's designs for a "Monument to the 3rd International" (fig. 22) as useless romanticism saying of Tatlin's tower that he would like very much to see it built but that it never would be as it was totally technically incompetent and unrealistic.

Gabo executed other projects which explored the similarities between

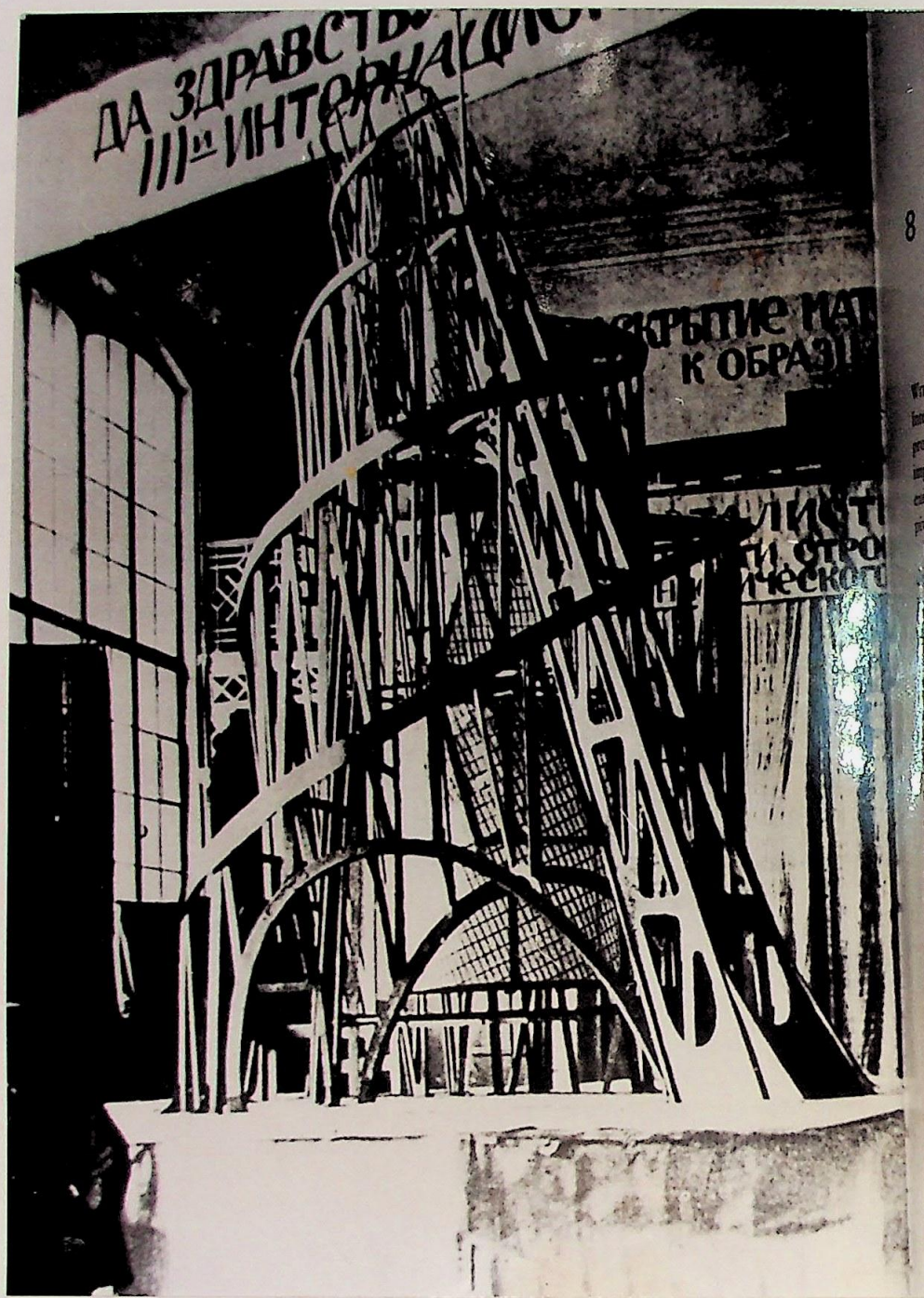


fig 22. 'Monument for the Third International', Tatlin (1919-20)

constructive sculpture and architecture and worked on specifically architectural designs. His design for 'Column' (fig. 23) originally worked out in Russia in 1920 and 1921 was only constructed in 1923 but it was an immediate result of those investigations. 'Column' was much more structurally articulate than the 'Project for a Radio Station'. The actual structure had advanced a lot from the original sketch and its relationship to technology was also more clearly expressed by his use of new transparent materials. However, it still remained an artistic aesthetic object. Gabo's main concern was always artistic, he believed without any doubt that art could spiritually and materially influence the environment, but without being reduced to utilitarianism. He wrote, around 1921,:

"The aim of our time consists in creating a harmonious human being and we strive in our works to educate the spirit in this direction." (11)

This quotation underlines the major differences between Gabo and the other constructivists. A few months after the 'Realistic Manifesto's' appearance 'The Programme of the Productivist Group' was published, almost as a reply to the previous manifesto. There is some uncertainty about this document's exact origins, but it is usually associated directly with Tatlin, who was still the leading figure of the Constructivists. It was published as a reply to the Realistic Manifesto and was signed by Alexander Rodchenko and his wife Varvora Spezzonova. Rodchenko was one of Tatlin's original followers. 'The Programme of the Productivist Group' opens by stating:

"The task of the Constructivist Group is the communistic expression of materialistic constructive work." (12)

The Programme goes on to state the future tasks of the group, divided into three specific areas, ideological, practical and agitational and were as follows:

IDEOLOGY

(a) Proving by word and deed the incompatibility of artistic activity and

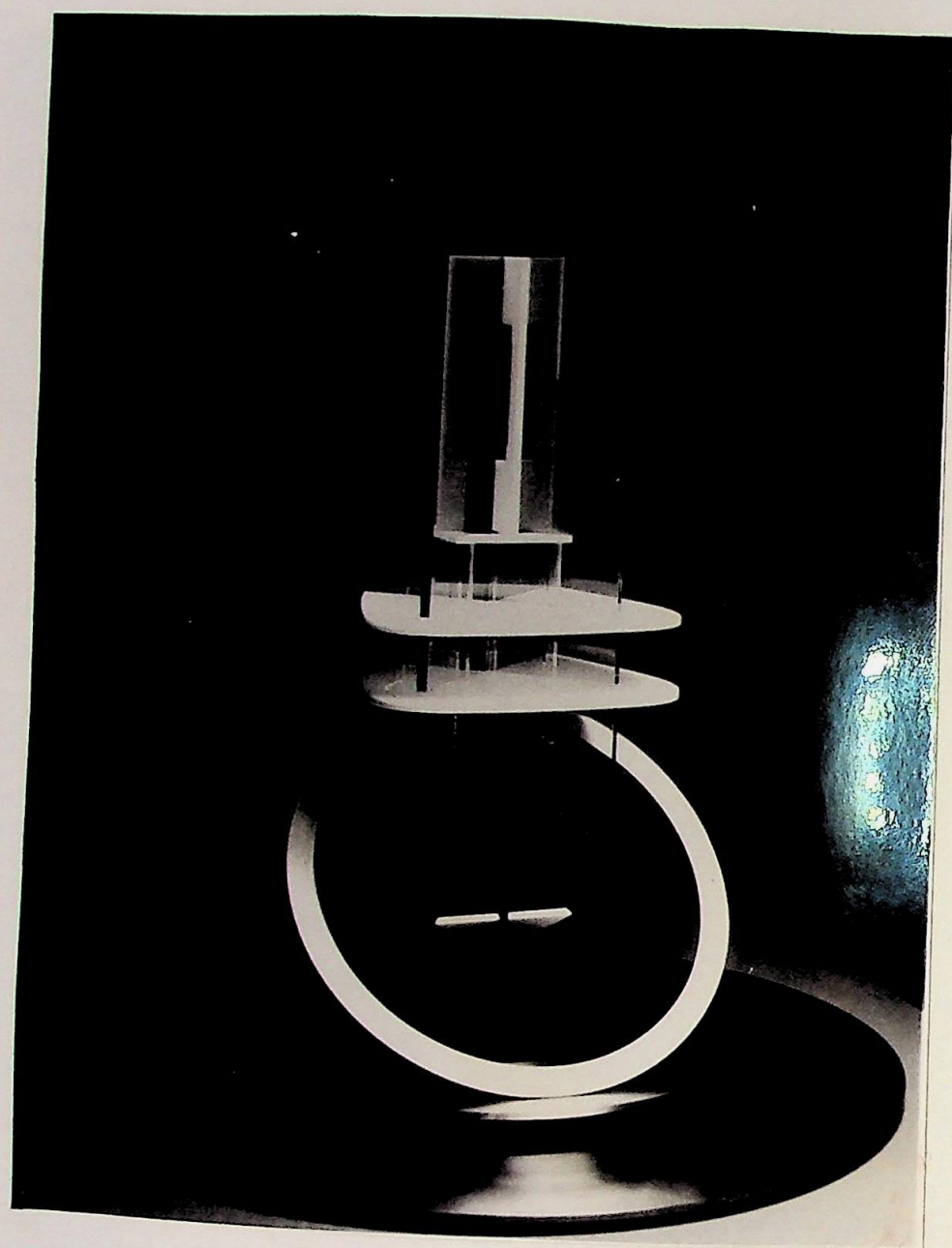


fig 23. 'Column', Gabo (1923)

intellectual production.

- (b) The real participation of intellectual production as an equivalent element in building up communistic culture.

IN PRACTICE

- (a) Agitation in the press.
- (b) Conception of plans.
- (c) Organisation of exhibitions.
- (d) Making contact with all the productive centres and main bodies of unified Soviet mechanism, which realise the communistic forms of life in practice.

IN THE FIELD OF AGITATION

- (a) The group stands for ruthless war against art in general.
- (b) The group proves that evolutionary transition of the past's art culture into the communistic forms of constructive building is possible. (13)

These tasks make no illusion to artistic or even aesthetic content as the Realistic Manifesto did. Art is brought into a very technical, scientific and useful world. It was a time of great insights into the future without much thought for realistic limitations. Art was at last to let go of romantic mysticism or any spiritual dimension, it was to become totally incorporated into a useful, preferably industrial, part of society.

Along with the productivists ideas of the interpretation of art with production and life and Gabo's synthesis between sculpture and architecture, Malevich's romantically cosmic Suprematism of the previous few years was being adapted and developing into the no less romantic idea of planning floating cities, and cities in space. Suprematist painting became a source for new three dimensional spatial architectural shapes ^(fig 24). It began to branch out into architecture and graphics in an attempt to create

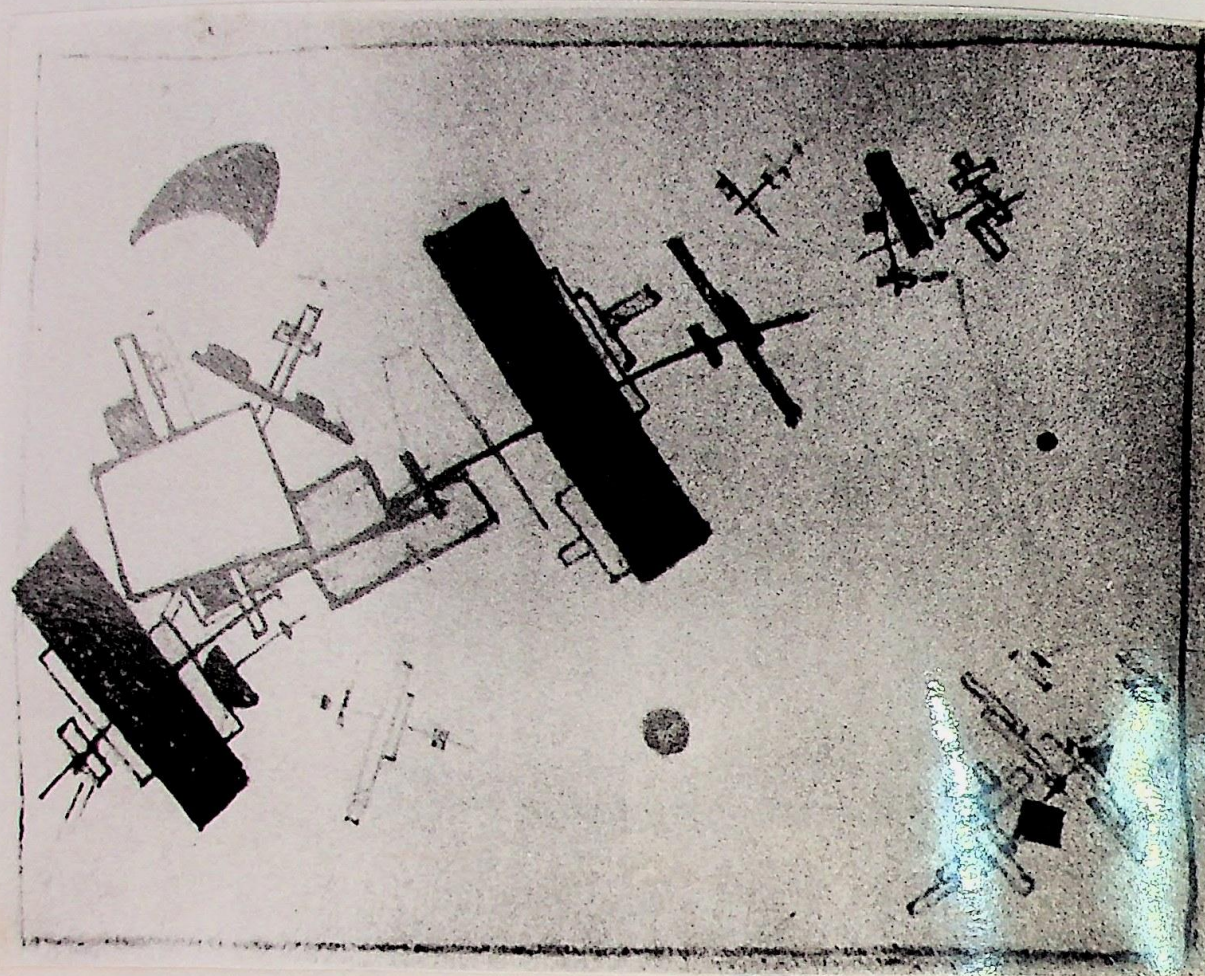


fig 24. 'Suprematist Structure', Malevich (1921)

a new universal system of art based on painting.

The intense and universal urge among painters to undertake architectural work culminated in Tatlin's project for a tower commemorating the 3rd International. It was described at the time as a distinct dream about the birth of a new architecture and the shape of a vision in which the dynamic drive of the present day was expressed by the strong upward spiral. Indeed, Tatlin's design for a tower/building was revolutionary. The external structure was to be made of iron, it consisted of two separate spirals moving upwards in the same direction but narrowing so that the building/structure did not overhang its own circumference on the ground. Within the structure three geometric forms were supported, the three forms correspond to the basic artistic geometric forms, that of a cube, a cylinder and a pyramid. These forms were intended to move, to revolve at different speeds and each was designated a specific function such as a hall for gatherings of the international executive committee and the secretariat. Tatlin also had planned that there would be projector facilities for projecting slogans and information onto the clouds. Although this was one of the most ambitious projects planned Tatlin never suggested how it was to be built or even if it was technically possible. A model for it was made but there was no reference in it to the elaborate machinery and gears that would be needed to move any of the sections.

The faith, commitment and enthusiasm bordering on fanaticism of the Productivist group did eventually have some effect on Malevich. In 1921 in a letter to some of his pupils he proclaimed that Suprematism should adopt a more Constructive approach to the present requirements of re-organising the world, he expressed his desire to rebuild the world according to a non-objective system. This must have been on his mind for some time as work dating from 1919 onwards shows drawings and models of

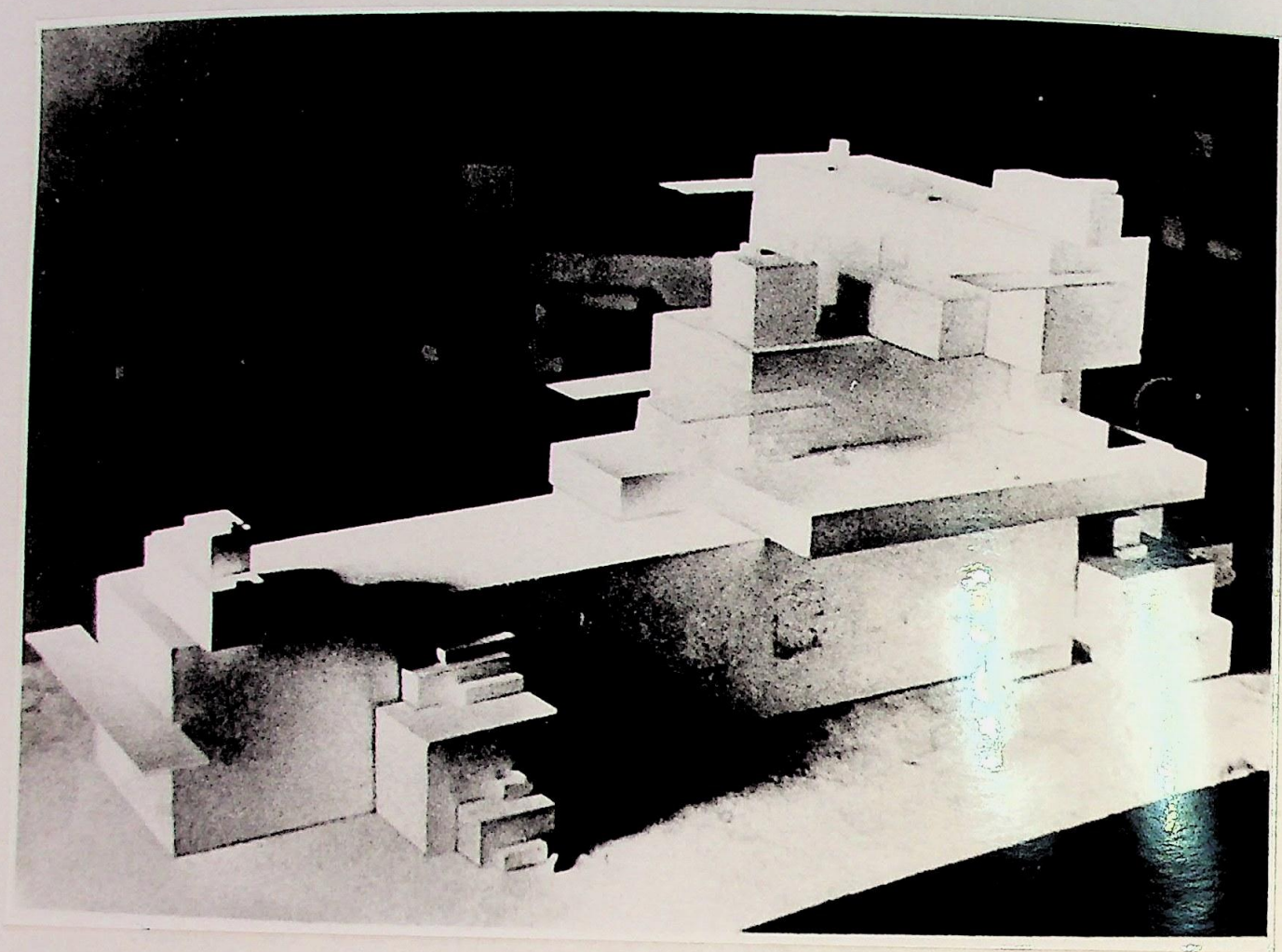


fig 25. 'Architecton Alpha', Malevich (1923)

three dimensional forms which originally in the initial stages were unrelated to any real specificity of function, size or method of construction. They were expressed solely in formal terms. However the forms gradually developed into working out ideas on architecture. Two exhibitions were held in Moscow in 1920 and 1921 by Malevich and his students. The exhibitions, the second in particular, included models of flying electric towers, dynamic villages, power stations and railway stations in the form of cardboard maquettes. Malevich however, unlike Tatlin, was aware that architecture demanded specialised knowledge and therefore entrusted the formulation of three dimensional Suprematism to El. Lissitsky, who was a trained architect. Malevich called his architectural sculptures 'Architectons' (fig. 25) and defined them as "architectural formulas according to which shape can be imparted to architectural structures." (14) Malevich always stressed the aesthetic character of his architectons, he repeatedly pointed out their non-utilitarian, non-purposeful nature. Admittedly architectural project work was involved but only as a matter of experiment and the achievements of pictorial Suprematism were used as part of it. When Malevich was working on architecture as a problem, he did away with from the start the limitations imposed on the function of a building, the engineering requirements and the availability of materials. These were in fact the very grounds of the continued dispute between Constructivism and Suprematism, and indeed they were also the roots of the disagreement between Gabo and the Productivists.

On a more mundane level Malevich did design some suprematist cups and saucers (fig. 27). He took the sphere and the cube as the most basic fundamental shapes and re-interpreted the forms of these objects with little regard for any of the visual functional requirements, manufacturing processes or materials. In this sense, Malevich steered clear of any

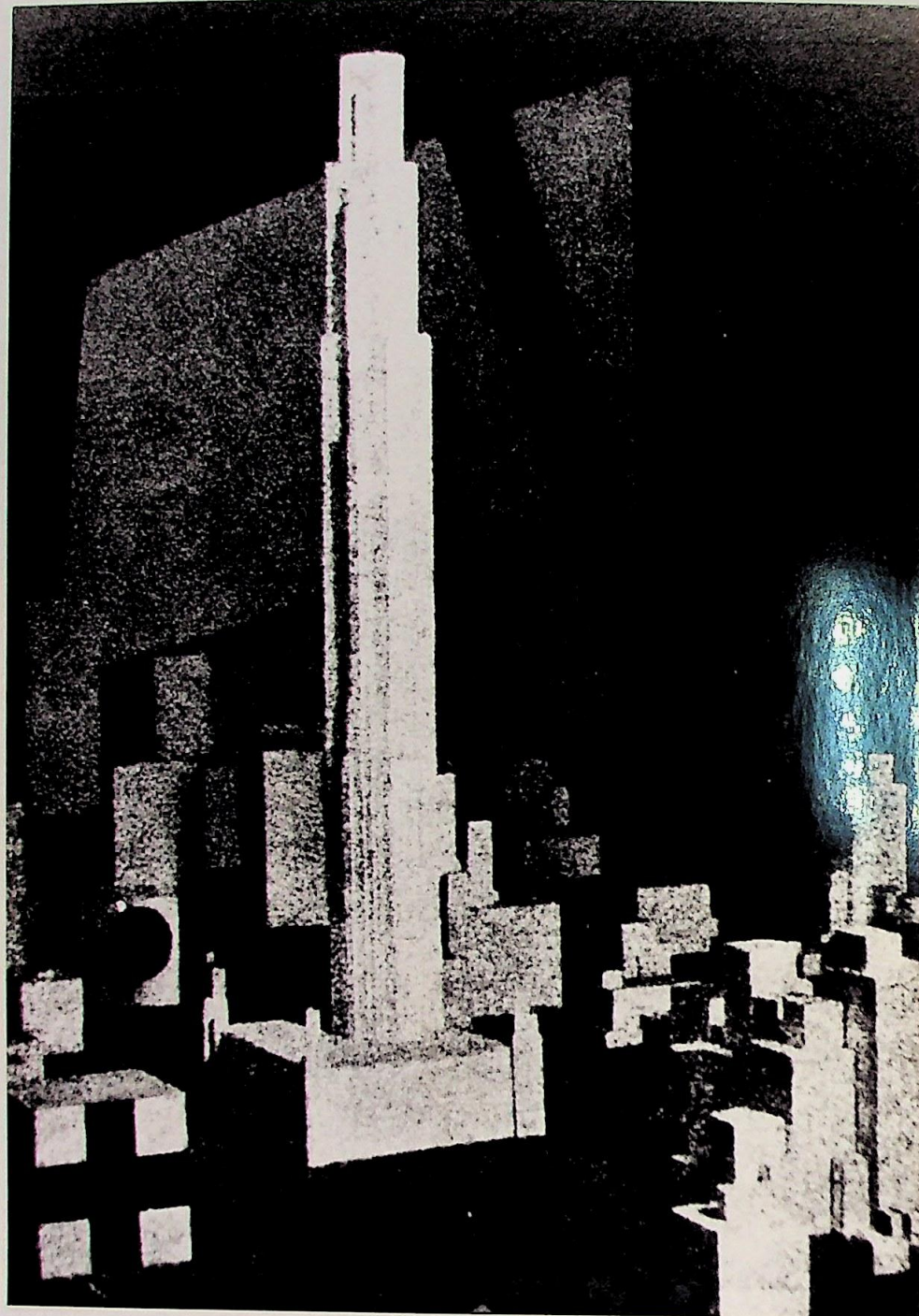


fig 26. 'Architecton Luko's', Malevich (1926)?

utilitarianism or functionalism, while at the same time allowing his own work and theories to develop in a parallel way to the Productivists. As modern architecture and design developed the obsessions with engineering and technology, along with the literal application of the slogan 'Form follows function', became in most ways the downfall of the era. Even at the height of his support for Productivist ideas, Malevich steadfastly held to the belief that they could only be implemented in terms of art, specifically design or project art. Malevich made designs for flying houses in which he considered how they would be heated, cleaned and generally maintained. In his designs for the houses of the future, Malevich, it appears, was trying to create an idea of a convenient living accommodation. This is in fact sympathetic to the aims of the Productivists because in principle Malevich supported joint projects, his approach to working was quite broad allowing conflicting ideas to co-exist in his work. Malevich developed two different types of architectons, horizontal ones and vertical ones. The vertical architectons (fig. 26) are not dissimilar to contemporary American sky scrapers, yet at the same time it is obvious that their suprematist architectural conception was quite different from the approach of his American contemporary architects or indeed modern architects. The distribution of volume is more successfully resolved and they are visually more accessible than the vast majority of similar designs which were built which, in general, tended to be clumsy and oppressive. Many of the forms created by Malevich recall classical antiquity by their high pillar-like forms and also a peculiarly suprematist form of fluting which in some respects is reminiscent of the doric order, the pillar which had been a mere element in that system here becomes a structure in its own right.

Gabo's work also bore a strong relationship to architecture. Alfred Barr writes in 'Cubism and Abstract Art' (p 138) that Gabo's constructions are

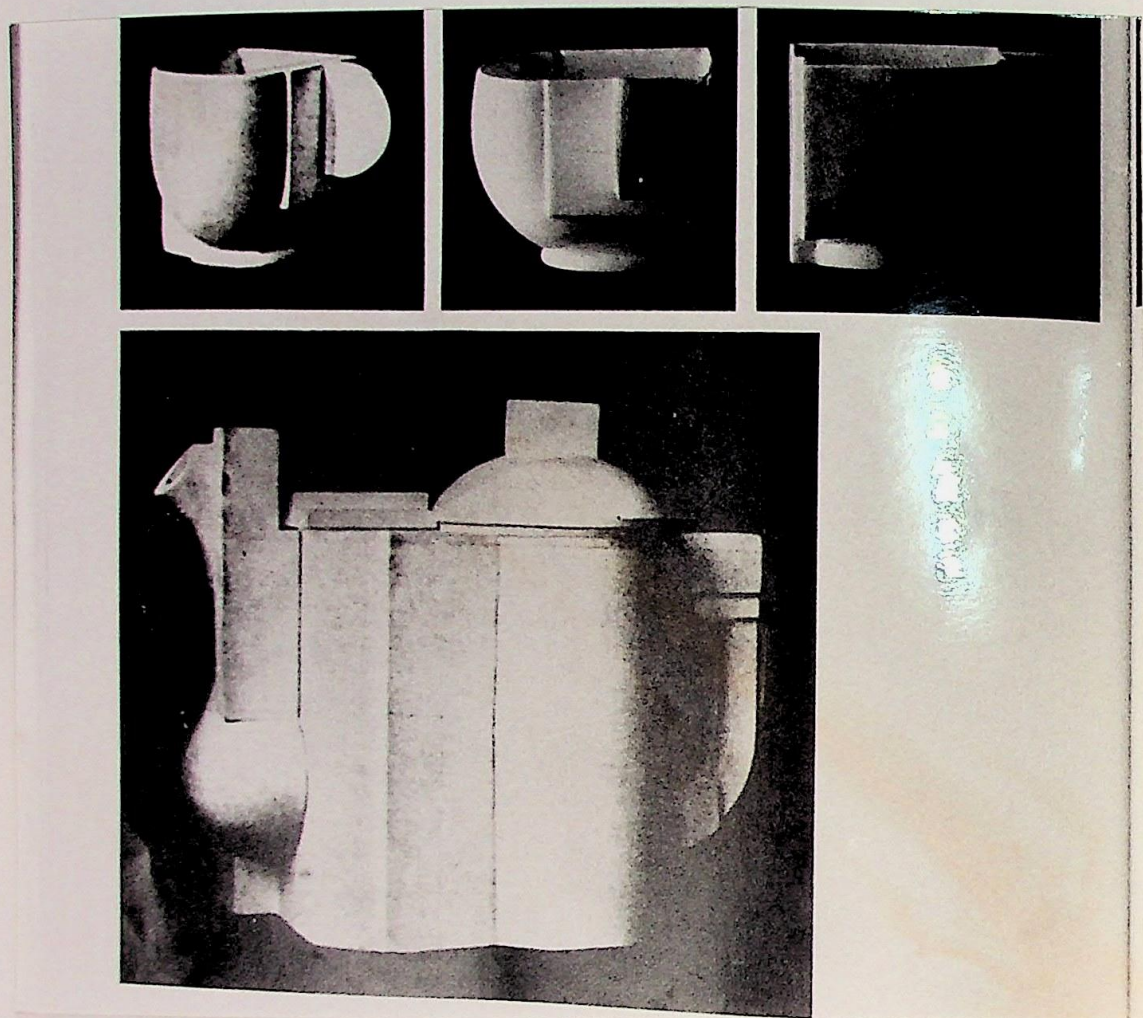


fig 27 'Cups and Teapot', Malevich (1923)

more in the spirit of architecture. In 'Circle' magazine Gabo wrote "the constructive idea has given back to sculpture its old forces and faculties, the most powerful of which is the capacity to act architecturally." (15) One of the most interesting things about Gabo's work from the point of view of architecture is his ability to suggest the way in which surfaces can enclose or suggest volumes. This is very obvious in much of his later work but its beginnings can be seen in Gabo's earliest pieces (Head No. 1), (Construction in Relief, 1920). Gabo appears to have worked consistently and separately from the rest of the avant garde. He had an intuitive appreciation of the relationship between form and force and of structural possibilities but did not at this stage consider his work as architectural models.

In May 1920 the Institute of Artistic Culture was opened in Moscow with Kandinsky at its head. It was a research institute in which the other leading members of the avant garde participated. It was in this institute that Kandinsky soon encountered opposition to his ideal of a pure abstract art with an expressive function. In June he presented a programme which he had worked out for the Institute at the first all Russian Conference of Teachers and Students at the State free Art and Industrial Art Studios. His plan showed a logical development of the ideas he had investigated in 'On the Spiritual in Art'. He maintained that the inter-relationships between painting, sculpture and architecture should be researched with the further aim of progressing to monumental art or art as a unified whole involving all the arts. With this in mind, music, literature, theatre, dance, circus and variety shows were to be analysed to discover their effect on the psyche. Several of the features of his proposal represent the continuation of certain aspects of his earlier thinking that ultimately derive from Symbolism, his concern with expression and intuition, with the

integration of the arts and with the findings of occult sciences such as chromotherapy. Kandinsky's programme included Malevich's Suprematism, Tatlin's Culture of Materials as well as Kandinsky's own theories. It was an attempt to systemise the various trends into a logical teaching method.

The positivist and materialistic orientation of his institute colleagues along with their growing doubts regarding the validity of pure art caused them to reject his programme. Kandinsky was bitterly disappointed and left the Institute at the end of 1920.

At the same time Lunacharsky invited him to help re-organise various educational and artistic institutions in Moscow as an Academy of Sciences. This was in accordance with Lenin's New Economic Policy and formed part of Lunacharsky's scheme for the re-organisation of the educational system of the country. Kandinsky again submitted a similar programme to that he had worked out for Inkhuk but his plan was never implemented although for different reasons, the authorities were preoccupied with acute problems of lack of food, fuel and living space and Kandinsky's programme, although not rejected, was shelved.

Passionate debates were a frequent occurrence, the inevitable subject being the question of the role of the artist and of art in the new communist society. The Institute of Artistic Culture in Moscow was the centre of these debates. From the outset there was an obvious and expected division among Institute members which became more and more pronounced by the end of 1921. On one side stood Malevich, Kandinsky and Gabo. Their beliefs which Kandinsky had written about in his 'On the Spiritual in Art' and Gabo had laid out in his Manifesto argues that art was essentially a spiritual activity. Its purpose was to order and in some way make sense of man's vision of the world. The clinical systematisation of artwork and the



fig 28. 'Teacup and Saucer,' Kandinsky (1920).

evolution of artists into engineers, they declared, was to descend to the level of a craftsman. Art, they stated, was by its very nature useless, superfluous and way above workmanlike functional designs. In becoming useful, art ceases to exist. In becoming a utilitarian designer the artist ceases to provide the source for new design. Malevich in particular felt that industrial design was necessarily dependent on abstract creation and that design was a second-hand activity. Opposing this point of view was Tatlin and his closest follower, Rodchenko, who was also an ardent communist. They insisted that the artist must become a technician, that he must learn to use the tools and materials of modern production and industrialisation in order for his work to be of immediate access and benefit to the ordinary working classes. Tatlin had made this clear in his productivist manifesto and so both groups relentlessly maintained and substantiated their beliefs. It is ironic that both Kandinsky and Malevich had a great interest in applied arts. As previously mentioned, Malevich did quite a lot of work in designing not only cups and saucers but living accommodation, theatre sets and costumes and designs for book covers and graphics. Kandinsky was also quite accomplished in the area of applied arts as his Munich period designs show. While being interviewed for an article in a Russian art periodical in 1921 Kandinsky referring to the productivists' standpoint, declared that he had been designing and making cups and saucers from early 1920 (fig. 28). In his ceramic designs Kandinsky used characteristic elements from his pictorial imagery. This was more a decorative notion to applied art and not so much a utilitarian approach. Kandinsky's ceramic designs were not productivist in intention, they in no way represent a rejection of fine art nor an affirmation of the importance of utilitarian aims. Malevich's designs were, like Kandinsky's, along the lines of decorative works rather than functional objects. Both artists, I believe, felt that it was important to work with practical

useful objects in an artistic way. This idea was probably initiated by the call of revolutionaries to artists to produce useful goods, to go out and join the workers and participate in all aspects of the development of a new culture. Both Malevich and Kandinsky responded to the call as did the Productivists but the division between both groups remained unbreachable.

By late 1921 Kandinsky's alienation from the Russian avant garde was practically complete. Although he had worked energetically in the various programmes of Narkompros (The People's Commissariat for Education) and had exhibited and published frequently he was unable to exercise any significant influence in the artistic field. Another factor which had strong bearing on Kandinsky's departure from Russia were the harsh reviews he had received from the important avant garde critic, Nikolai Punin, as early as 1917 and 1919. He said of Kandinsky's work that it was romantic, literary and illogical, a view that was shared by most of the avant garde particularly Productivist circles. In autumn of 1921, Gropius invited Kandinsky to visit the Bauhaus in Weimer. The following year he was offered a teaching position there. This in itself is very ironic, as the philosophy and teaching principle of the Bauhaus was synopsised in its slogan 'Form follows function'.

Although Gabo and his work did not suffer the same outright rejection as Kandinsky, he, by late 1921, felt there was no longer any place for him in Russian art circles, opposition from the Productivist group and a growing reactionary trend from the government and the public against the avant garde in general had begun to make his position in Russia a little unstable. Tolerance of abstraction decreased as the Civil War came to an end allowing the new government to focus more on domestic and economic issues, increasing demands for a more publicly accessible art through which to promote socialist ideals. In 1921 there was a re-organisation of the

'IZO' (Department of Fine Arts). The avant garde were faced with the re-emergence of the academic right, a group that never completely disappeared. Although Gabo maintained faith in the principles of the Communist Revolution for a long time afterwards, the realities of the political and cultural situation in Russia forced Gabo to decide to leave. Gabo left for Berlin early in 1922.

FOOTNOTES

- (1) The Russian Experiment in Art, Camilla Grey, p. 273
- (2) Gabo - 60 Years of Constructivism, Steven Nash, p. 50
- (3) Malevich - Suprematism and Revolution in Russian Art, Larissa Zhardova, p. 81
- (4) The Russian Experiment in Art, Camilla Grey, p. 240
- (5) Malevich - Suprematism and Revolution in Russian Art, Larissa Zhardova, p. 69
- (6) Ibid, p. 71
- (7) The Russian Experiment in Art, Camilla Grey, p. 230
- (8) Gabo - Introduction, H. Read, p. 30
- (9) Ibid
- (10) 60 Years of Constructivism, Steven Nash, p. 41
- (11) Russian Constructivism, Christina Lodder, p. 83
- (12) Gabo - Introduction, H. Read, p. 33
- (13) Documents of 20th Century Art - The Tradition of Constructivism, Stephen Bann, p. 18
- (14) Malevich - Suprematism and Revolution Russian Art, Larissa Zhardova, p. 52
- (15) Circle, Gabo - Nicholson, p. 62



fig 29 In Peaceful Fields, Mylnikov (1950)

CHAPTER FIVE

1922 also saw the revitalisation of realism by the formation of a new artistic organisation the 'Association of the Artists of Revolutionary Russia', better known by the abbreviation AKhRR. Founded after a discussion at the 47th Exhibition of The Wanderers, from the very outset it considered the task of revolutionary painting to be the depiction of revolutionary events and combined this with an uncompromising realist stance and a stern rejection of all artistic experience.

"Artists in our society must depict accurately in painting and sculpture the events of the Revolution. They must portray its leaders and participants and illustrate the role of the people - the simple toilers - the workers and the peasants." (1)

Their credo was heroic realism, although no precise definition of heroic realism as an artistic method was formulated, in practice it involved depicting with documentary accuracy themes related to the revolution and social reconstruction and an aggressive opposition to formal artistic investigation. AKhRR's dedication to realism as an artistic style and the revolution as subject matter quickly gained official support. The central committee of the party was assured of its allegiance and advised members to go into factories and workshops and depict the workers in everyday life (fig. 29), as opposed to joining art with industrialisation they made a definite separation, a far cry from joining the workers in the creation of a new society art was to be brought back to easel painting and galleries. This series of events proved to be very discouraging for remaining constructivists, many of them left, some permanently, others for extended stays abroad.

Kandinsky's arrival in Bauhaus in 1922 coincided with a change that was

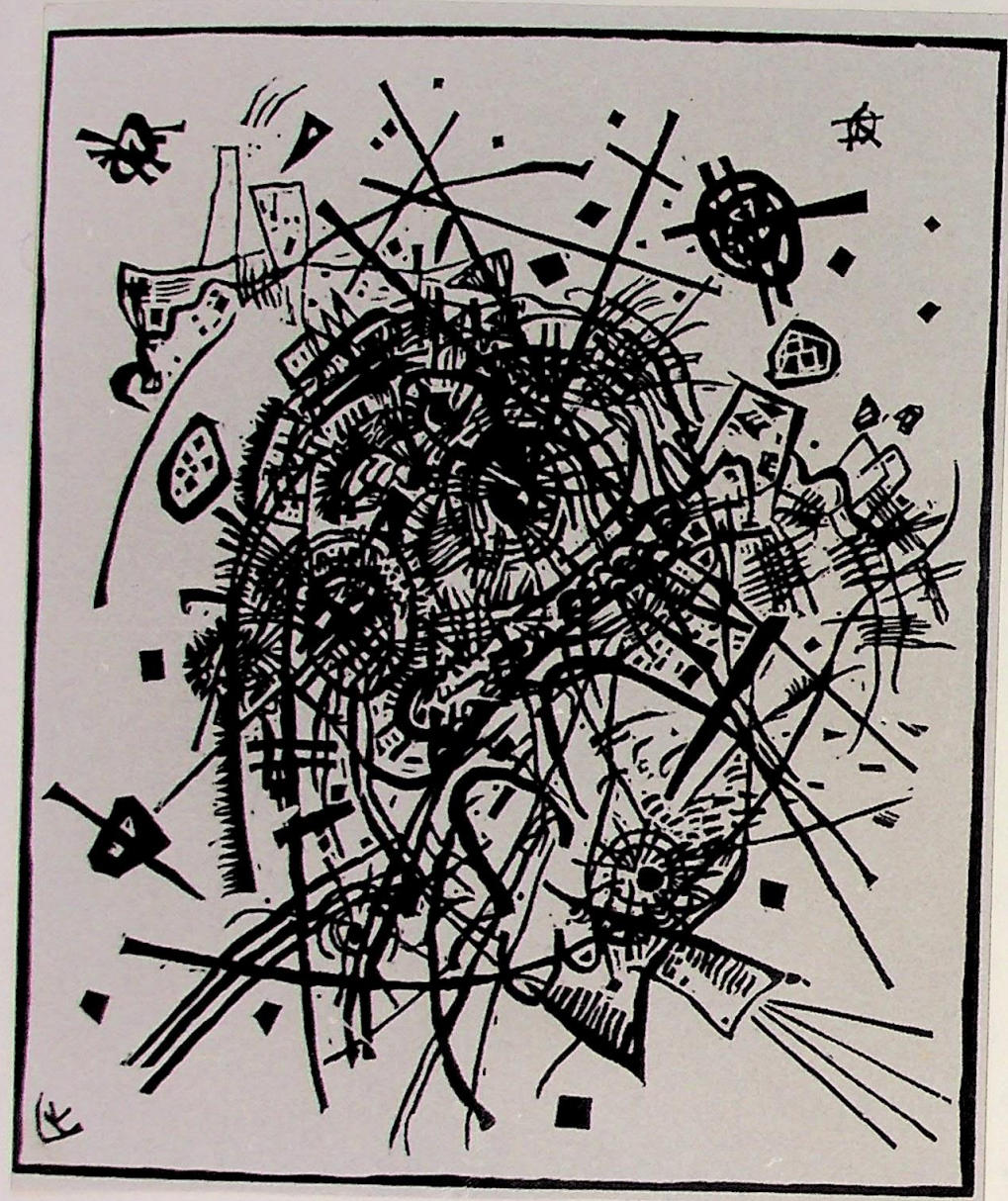


fig 30. 'Small Worlds VIII', Kandinsky (1922)

beginning to take place in its theoretical and stylistic orientation. It was turning away from Expressionism and moving into the use of a more universal, objective and constructivist view point. Kandinsky must have been overjoyed to find he was involved in the developing stages of an "international house of art" which held none of the antagonisms towards him that had been evident in Russia. In the founding proclamation Gropius issued a manifesto stating:

"The Bauhaus aims to unite every thing that has reference to artistic creation, to bring together in a new creative art, all the disciplines of the arts and crafts, inseparable elements in its construction ... the union of all the arts in an indivisible whole, whose synthesis lies in man and which has meaning and significance only in the context of life that is lived." (2)

This appeared to be everything that Kandinsky had dreamed of, his longed for grand synthesis. Everything he had tried to encourage in Russia in the Institute of Artistic Culture was welcomed and implemented in the Bauhaus. Gropius believed that artists could provide the necessary vision for the creation of a new kind of design that would serve modern society, and Kandinsky readily complied. In the first year back in Germany Kandinsky executed five oil paintings which show a more confident development of the synthetic style of the Russian period. This can be seen in their combination of geometric and free forms, circles, triangles, bars and checkerboard patterns appear alongside irregular invented shapes and loosely applied paint.

The continuing development of elements from the Russian period and the revival of images from his Munich years characterise one of Kandinsky's major works of 1922, a portfolio of twelve print entitled 'Small Worlds'.

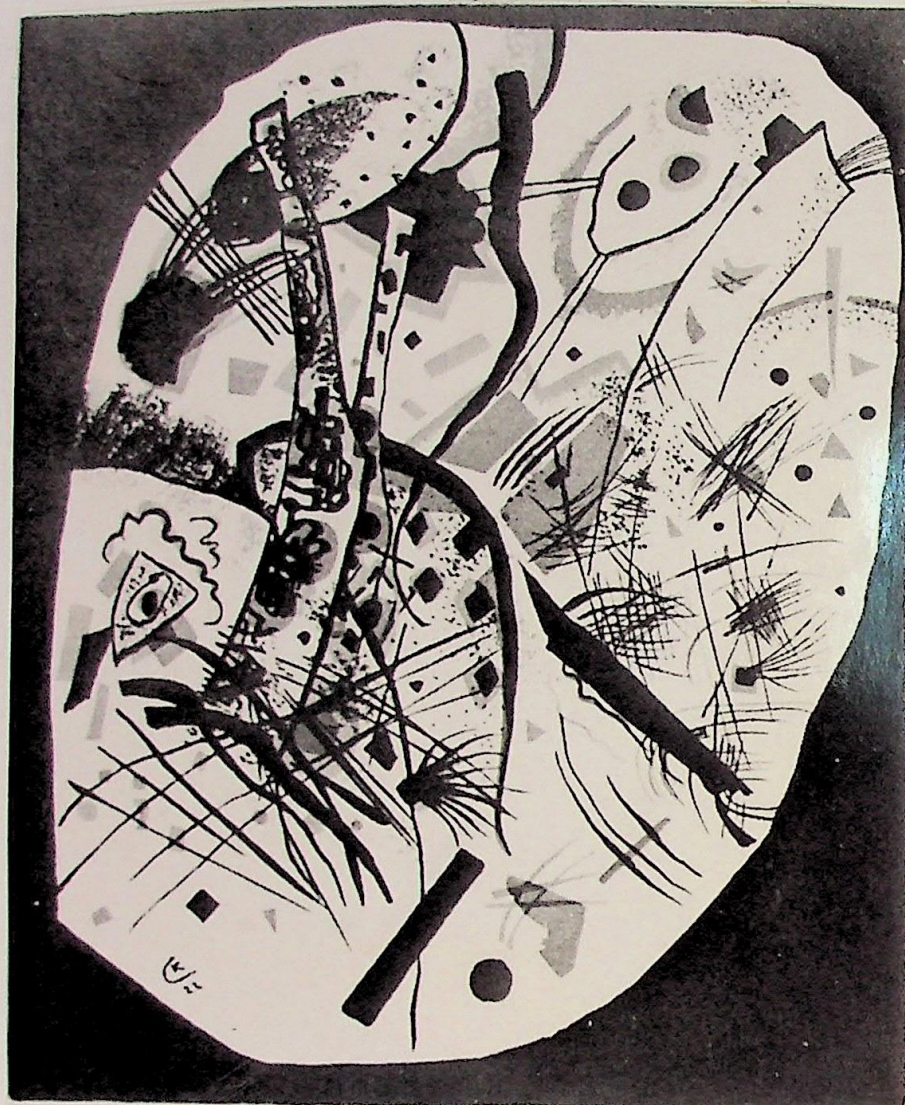


fig 32. 'Small Worlds III', Kandinsky (1922)

A product of Kandinsky's first month at the Bauhaus and of his first years back living in Germany, these prints are especially interesting for their range of imagery, which is both retrospective and forward-looking. From his years in Munich came the hilltop citadels in 'Small Worlds VIII' (fig. 30) and the single oared boat of 'Small Worlds II'. Others show devices from Kandinsky's Russian years including the landscape motif and oval border of 'Small Worlds III' (fig. 31). The checkerboards and grids in several of the prints are constructivist elements that Kandinsky first used in Russia in 'On White', 1920 (fig. 32). The checkerboard and striped diagonals are obvious precedents for 'Small Worlds IV'. The indications of perspective are contradictory, all elements appear to recede and at the same time to be flat, further spatial tensions are provided by the large, black ring which counteracts the illusion bringing everything back to the surface. Kandinsky's use of the grid and checkerboard also accords with the great interest in these forms at the Bauhaus, yet it is probable that Kandinsky's grids originated in Russia. There can be no doubt that his close association with leaders of the avant garde and exposure to their art affected his own development. The true effect of his years in Russia were not seen until a year after his departure, when Kandinsky used for the first time a ruler and compass in his drawings (fig. 33). This new departure which Kandinsky had criticised while he was in Russia was due mainly to the influence of Rodchenko who had along with Lissitsky pioneered this clinically technical way of working. Kandinsky did not adopt the geometrical motifs in the same format as Rodchenko but used them towards different objectives and in the context of his own style, so rather than being reductive as they were in other Russian's works, Kandinsky used them with the same multiplicity as he had used freehand motifs. It may have been Rodchenko and Lissitsky more than any other avant garde artists who Kandinsky had in mind when he criticised Constructivism for banishing intuition and placing too much faith in calculated mathematical approach to



fig 31,

'Small Worlds IV' Kandinsky
(1922)



fig 32, 'On white' Kandinsky
(1925)

pictorial composition. Although there had by 1922 - 1923 been a radical change in Kandinsky's work it still remained recognisably his own. Kandinsky continued to maintain that 'free art' should be the basis for the practical arts, long after the Bauhaus had begun to emphasise utilitarian design.

Malevich while teaching in one of the provinces had remained outside the furious debates to a greater extent than Kandinsky or Gabo. He therefore was not as affected by the adamant theorising of the Constructivist group. Nor was he in as obvious a minority as were Kandinsky and Gabo. Malevich and his students had travelled to Moscow twice from Vitebsk in 1920 and 1921 for the two previously mentioned exhibitions. In the spring of 1922 Unovis was closed down, it may have been an administrative decision brought about by extreme tension between the local authorities and Malevich's group. Perhaps Malevich and his students had exhausted themselves, and realised that reality had been ignored. Unovis had developed into the realm of romanticism and utopia while attempting to solve all the problems of art reform on a nationwide scale. The Unovis's slogan which was a call to make "a new garb for all things on earth" had remained a romantic notion and there was now a need for more practical work if they were to survive as artists. In Moscow the Institute of Artistic Culture was completely taken over by the Constructivist group, allowing no room for others. So Malevich moved to Petrograd. Since the capital has been moved to Moscow the decision to go to Petrograd at that time was almost equivalent to being shelved. For a while Malevich worked as a decorator in a porcelain factory but in 1923 he was appointed head of the Museum of Painting Culture by the Chief Administration of Science. Malevich re-organised it into the Research Institute for Artistic Culture abbreviated to Ginkhuk. Many of his students from Unovis joined him in Petrograd. Ginkhuk was more

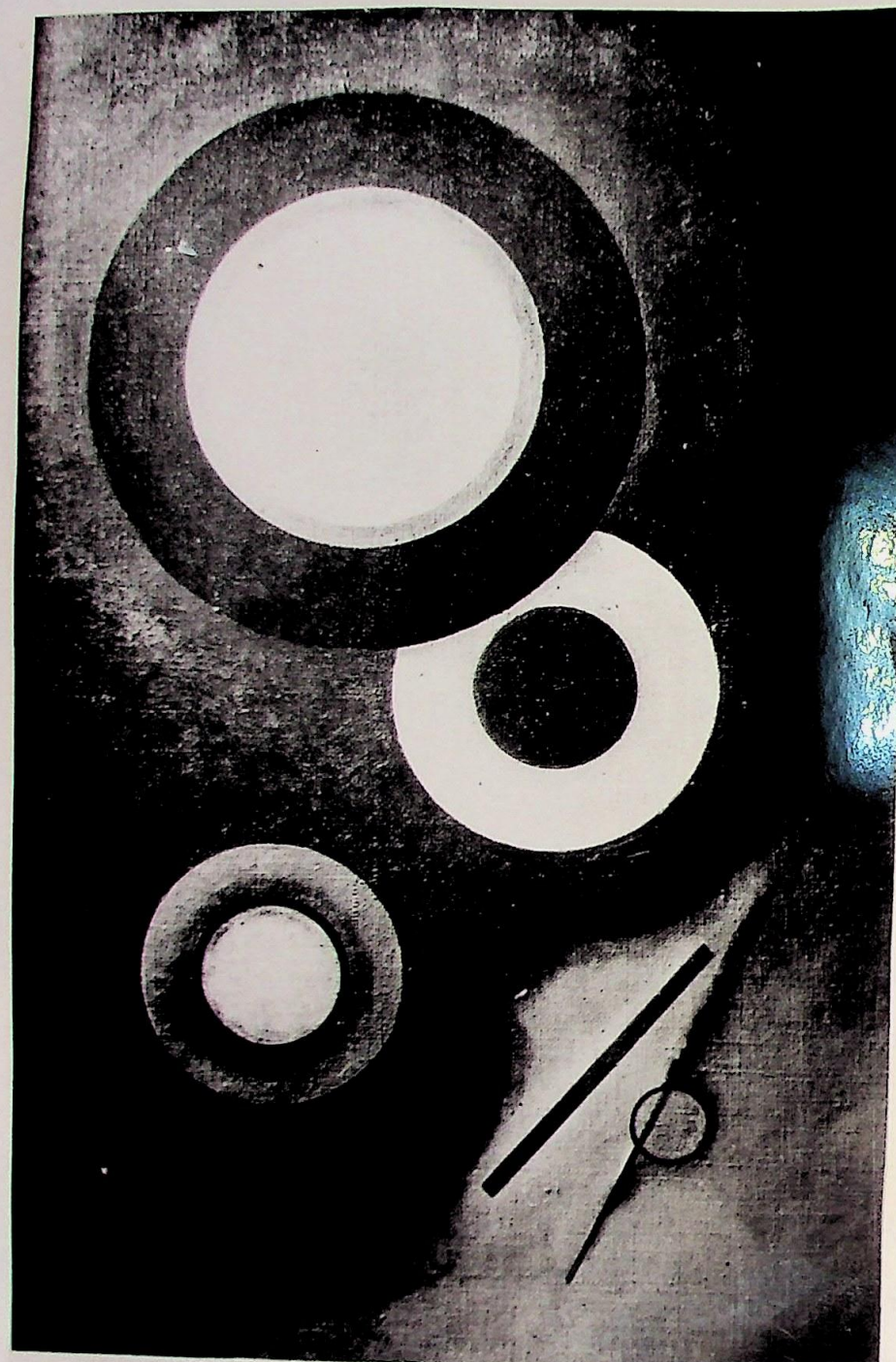


fig 33. 'Firmly Enclosed', Kandinsky (1926)

businesslike and modest than Unovis had been. Unlike Unovis, Malevich did not claim that Ginkhuk was to be the ecumenical council of all the arts. However close interest was maintained in other arts, literature, theatre and music greatly contributed to fostering a creative atmosphere in which the tradition of searching for a synthesis within the new artistic culture could be preserved and developed. In his own work Malevich continued working with three dimensional Suprematism, Architectons. Side by side with the architectons he began to develop a whole series of projects for Planets 'The Houses of the Future'. These are mainly known to us from drawings and represent the translation of his earlier Suprematist paintings into spatially conceived aerodynamic constructions. Malevich continued to work and develop architectons. He became interested in planning towns and suburbs (fig. 34). He believed that the Revolution had provided the basis for the development of art to be able to integrate all of society. He had developed his own ideologies quite distinct from those of the Constructivists and had continued to work from them. As a particular point of interest Malevich returned in 1929 to portraiture. A series of drawings of peasants with oval faces dating from 1929 and 1930 (fig. 35) seem to show a fresh start along the lines of his early neo-primitivist period. One particular painting is a version of a painting he made in 1904, 'The Flower Girl' (figs. 36 and 37).

In Malevich's return to realistic painting he was not denying all the work in non-objectivity he had done previously but searching for the most elementary formula for depicting the human being. His return to the point he had departed from in 1913 offers a curious conclusion to the work he had pioneered so successfully fifteen years earlier.

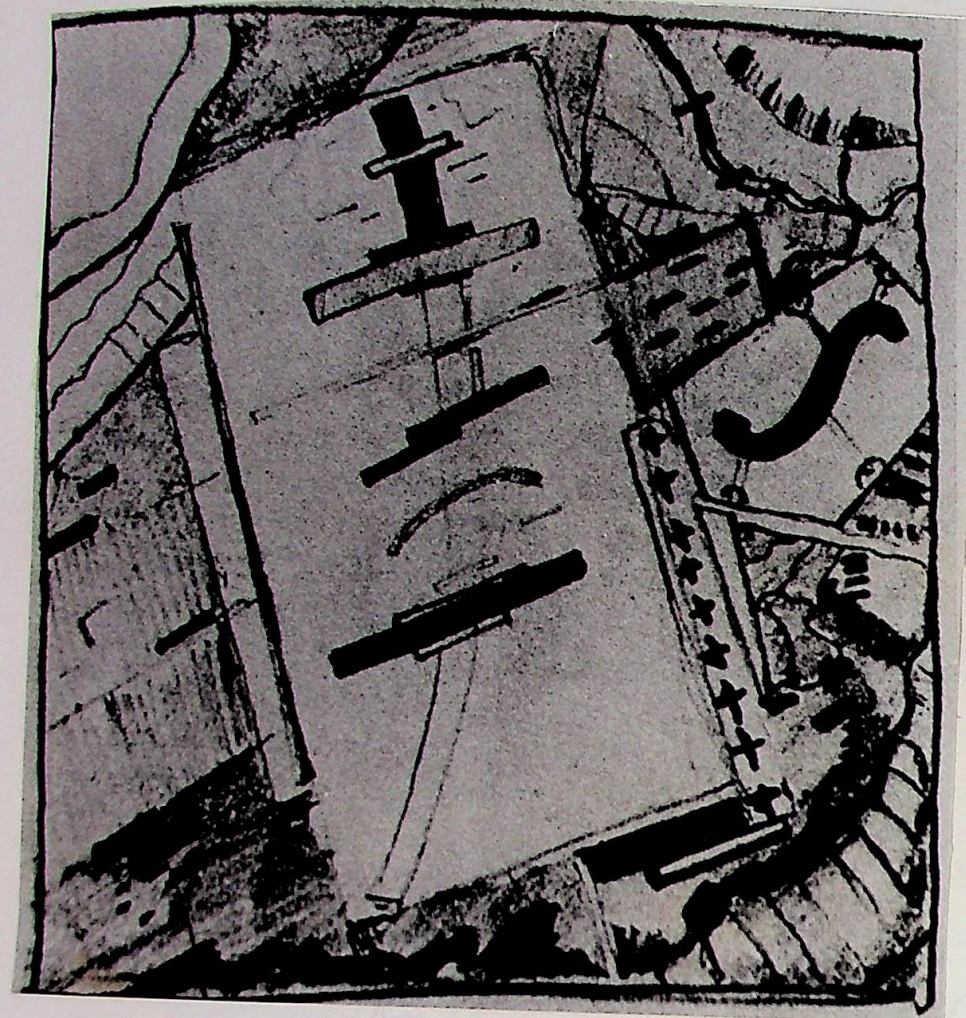


fig 34. 'Suprematis Design (aerial view)', Malevich (1927)

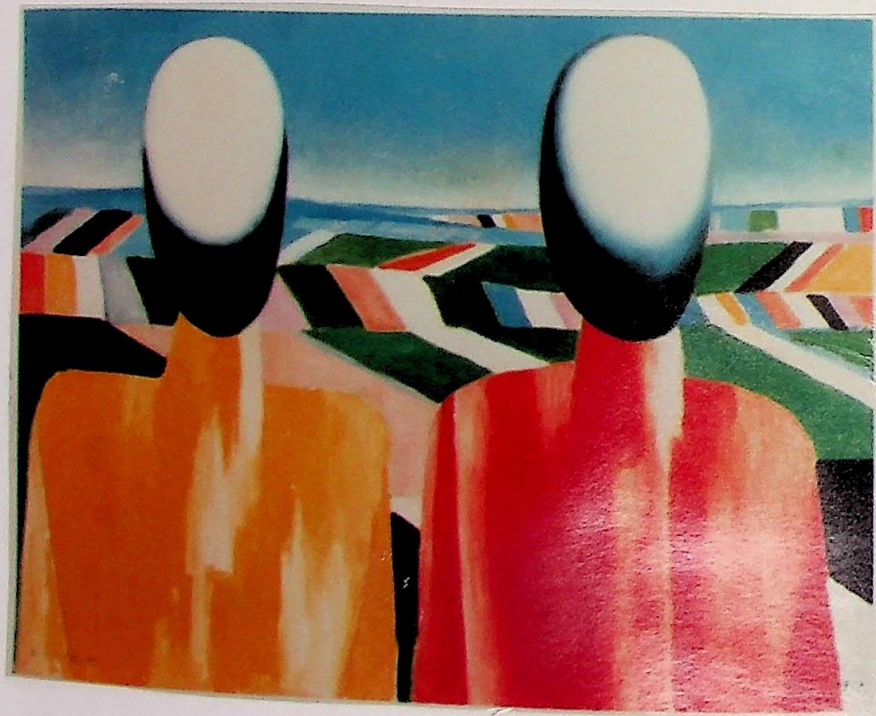


fig 35. 'Two Peasants with field in Background', Malevich (1929-30)

FOOTNOTES

- (1) Russian Constructivism, Christina Lodder, p. 184
- (2) Kandinsky, Peirre Volboudt, p. 54



fig 36. 'Woman with Flowers,' 1904, Malevich



fig 37. 'Woman with Flowers,' 1930, Malevich

CONCLUSION

As dealt with in detail in Chapter IV, there were distinct specific developments in Kandinsky's work which relate directly to the Productivist movement. Images and forms central to his work from his Munich period are carried through but they become much more geometrically delineated and impersonal. I am convinced that there is a certain ambivalence about his move to the Bauhaus and the subsequent minimal geometry which he began to use there. In Munich, Kandinsky had built up a reputation for himself as an artist. On his return to Russia he found that his reputation was not held in high regard. After the Revolution his efforts at setting up and organising an art school were rejected, as was his artwork. Kandinsky continued to defend his position and his work to his contemporaries in Russia until his departure. His move to the Bauhaus definitely offered solace, he was back in Germany where he still had a good reputation. He was able to relax as he no longer had to defend his work or theories. He felt free to work with pure form and geometry as can be seen in all his subsequent work. In Russia, because he was in such a defensive position, I am convinced that he did not allow his work to develop any obvious constructive tendencies and in retrospect it was only in 1925 - 1926 that he fully took on board the influences he must have absorbed while in Russia.

Due to the fact that Gabo had little experience as an artist in 1917, it is undeniable that he was influenced by the cultural and artistic developments. Yet, with Kandinsky and Malevich, he remained adamantly opposed to Productivism. In retrospect, the Bolshevik Revolution offered two opportunities to artists that is unique: the opportunity to devise and run artistic affairs at government level and, more significantly in Gabo's case, it gave artists the freedom to design and in many cases to make

massive works of art. Tatlin's tower could not, in my opinion, have been conceived under any other conditions. Despite the obvious impracticality of Tatlin's or Gabo's plans, the Revolution gave all those involved with it a confidence that has carried through in their work.

As discussed in Chapter III, Malevich's development was quite different and separate from his contemporaries. Suprematism was by 1917 - 1918 a well developed movement. The Revolution added an extra dimension to it, and as can be seen in Chapter IV, formal aspects of Suprematism were adopted and used as popular motifs. The most obvious development in Malevich's work dating from this time is the development into three dimensions such as architectons. I have concluded that this development and the further developments of architectons into possible living quarters and towns comes as a direct result of the utilitarian ideals which were so loudly advocated at the time.

The sad course of the Futurist avant garde and of non-objective art in particular is well known. By the end of the nineteen twenties, non-objective art had disappeared from studio practice. In 1932 all independent artistic organisations were proscribed, it was this that led to the stylistic levelling of all artistic production. The doctrine of socialist realism was officially proclaimed two years later. Wiping out all the accomplishments of non-objective creation, this doctrine effectively brought plastic arts back to the point of departure, the social realism of the Russian 19th century realists, The Wanderers.

In my opinion, 'Socialist Realism' is sinister. The Wanderers were not. The ideal of The Wanderers was to present reality to the people. Socialist Realism drew a blank over the preceding twenty years ignoring and denying

the innovatory work of a very new and important movement. Because of this, Socialist Realism is weak and superficial. Through the emigration of Kandinsky and Gabo and the subsequent development of their work there is a chance that we can gain some idea as to where Constructivism may have led. There are, obviously, several factors to be taken into consideration, their opposition to the utilitarian ideals of Productivism, along with the new social and political climate and contemporary European influences.

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