ENGINEER AGITATOR CONSTRUCTOR

THE ARTIST REINVENTED, 1918–1939
THE MERRILL C. BERMAN COLLECTION

MoMA

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JODI HAUPTMAN
ADRIAN SUDHALTER

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART, NEW YORK

The essential nature of artistic activity has changed fundamentally, progressing from representation of the spirit of things to conscious action.

—Varvara Stepanova, c. 1921[1]

Art must not be a manifestation of the artist's individualism, but the result of an effort by the collective in which the artist is the worker and inventor.

—Editors of *Blok*, 1924[2]

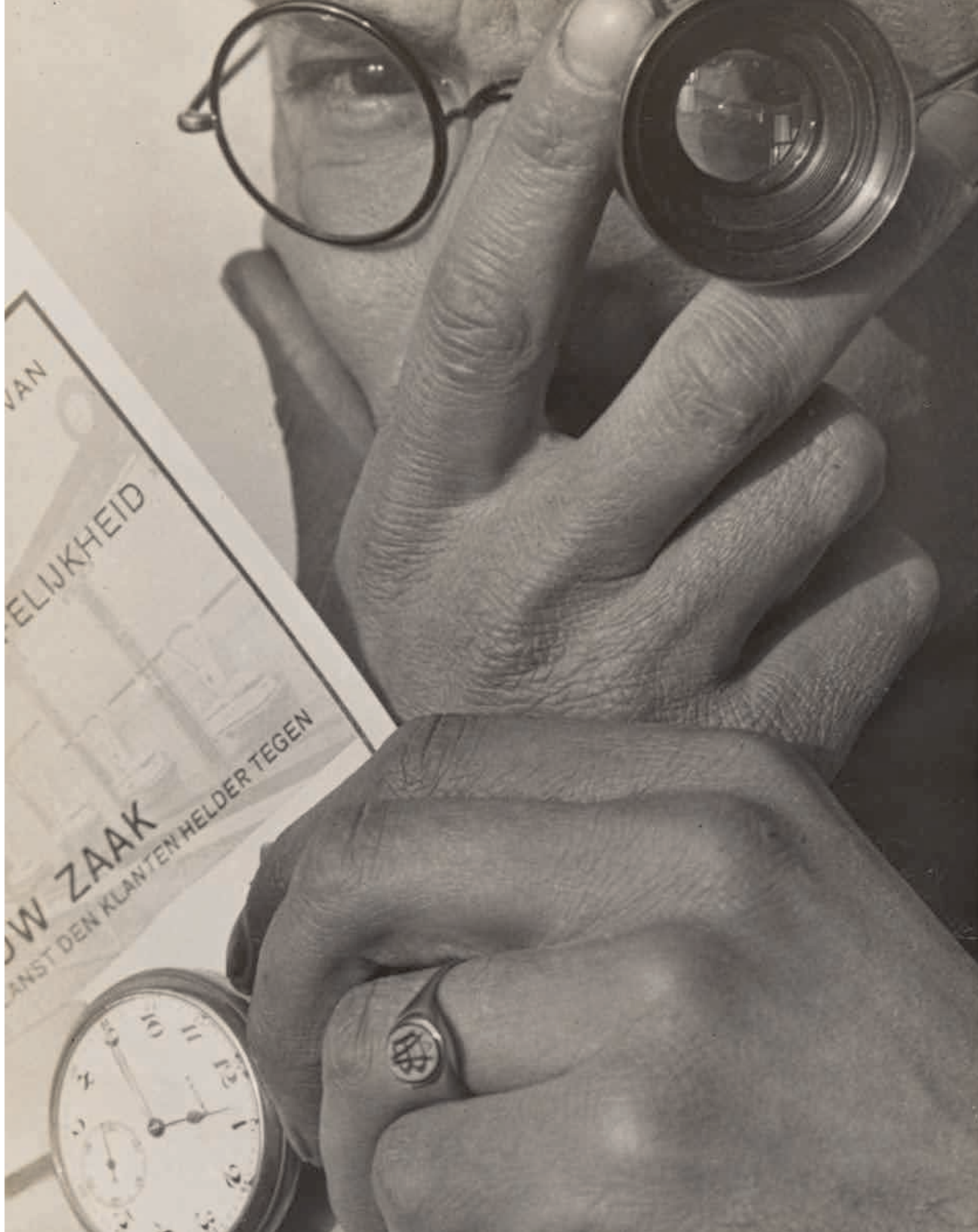
My mouth,
the working class's
megaphone.

—Vladimir Mayakovsky, 1926[3]

There has never been so much paper printed as today, the painter and draftsman have never had the opportunity to collaborate with print/the press as today. Through print they work for life.

—Ladislav Sutnar, 1938[4]

1. Varvara Stepanova, "On Constructivism" (fragmentary notes for a paper to be given at INKhUK on December 22, 1921), in *Art into Life: Russian Constructivism, 1914–1932*; trans. James West (Seattle and New York: Henry Art Gallery; Rizzoli, 1990), p. 74.
2. Editorial statement, *Blok*, no. 1 (March 8, 1924), in *Between Worlds: A Sourcebook of Central European Avant-Gardes*, ed. Timothy O. Benson and Éva Forgács, trans. Wanda Kemp-Welch (Los Angeles and Cambridge, MA: Los Angeles County Museum of Art; MIT Press, 2002), p. 491.
3. Vladimir Mayakovsky, "Razgovor s fininspectorom o poezii" (1926); trans. Katie Farris and Ilya Kaminsky as "Conversation with a Tax Collector about Poetry"; see p. 74 of this volume.
4. Ladislav Sutnar, "Poslání výtvarného umělce v reklamě," in *Umění do reklamy* (Prague: Novina, 1938), p. 29; repr. in *Ladislav Sutnar v textech* (*Mental Vitamins*), ed. Iva Knobloch (Prague: Kant-Uměleckoprůmyslové muzeum, 2010), p. 34; trans. Barbora Bartunkova.




ЭСКАДРЫ
ТЧИЦЫ


ЦЕНТРАЛЬНЫЙ ТЕА
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Nieder mit
dem Faschismus!

ЧИТЬ ТЕХНИКУ,
ЛАДЕТЬ НАУКОЙ"

ЗА ЧИСТУЮ СТОЛОВ

ДАРНИК

> The title “artist” is an insult.
> The designation “art” is an annulment of human equality.
> The deification of the artist is equivalent to self-deification.
>
> —John Heartfield and George Grosz, 1920[1]

Any tram stop, house, or kiosk designed in a new and constructive way is more valuable for students than all these abstract and pseudo-Productivist exercises.

—Elena Semenova, 1923[2]

> The advertisement is one of the most characteristic expressions of the level and economic circulation of our age. . . . An advertisement artist is a social creator.
>
> —Lajos Kassák, 1926[3]

Political slogans, photographs of socialist construction, and striking colors necessitated a wholly new type of artist, a socialist worker capable of handling these elements in such a way that they were comprehensible to the masses of workers and peasants.

—Gustav Klutsis, 1931[4]

1. John Heartfield and George Grosz, “Der Kunstlump,” *Der Gegner* 1, nos. 10–12 (April 1920): 48–56; trans. Don Reneau as “The Art Scab,” in *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook*, ed. Anton Kaes, Martin Jay, and Edward Dimendberg (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), p. 485.
2. Vkhutemaska (pseud. Elena Semenova), “Levaia metafisika,” *Lef*, no. 4 (1923): 219; trans. Maria Gough.
3. Lajos Kassák, “A reklám,” in *Tisztaság könyve* (Budapest: 1926), repr. “The Advertisement,” in *Lajos Kassák: The Advertisement and Modern Typography*, ed. Ferenc Csaplár (Budapest: Kassák Museum, 1999), p. 10; trans. Péter Pásztor.
4. Gustav Klutsis, “Fotomontage in der USSR,” in *Fotomontage* (Berlin: Staatliche Kunstbibliothek, 1931); facsimile and trans. in *Photomontage between the Wars, 1918–1939: Selections from the Merrill C. Berman Collection* (Madrid and Ottawa: Fundación Juan March; Carlton University Art Gallery, 2012), p. 132.

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In his 1966 introduction to the book *What Is Modern Painting?*, Alfred H. Barr, Jr., the founding director of The Museum of Modern Art, set out to answer that complex question, encouraging his readers to "stop reading a few minutes . . . and look." Implicit in his discussion is the equally important query: "What is a modern artist?" Barr reassures readers: they are "human beings like the rest of us," but they are also "pioneers"—counterparts to "modern scientists, inventors and explorers." Most evocatively, he describes artists as "the sensitive antennae of society," attuned to "the crucial problems of civilization: war, the character of democracy and fascism, the effects of industrialization."

This sensitivity to one's era is palpably on view in the works of the artists featured in the Merrill C. Berman Collection. Responding to the turbulent times of the early twentieth century—a period of world wars and revolutions; the establishment of new borders, states, and governments; massive expansion of industry; exponential growth of urban centers—these artists made new art for a new world, while reinventing their own roles as social agents. For some, this meant agitation and activism, a utopian belief that strong voices shape political discourse and have the potential to drive change. For others, it meant turning to industry as a model, utilizing or imitating technological innovations and the potentials of serial production. For still others, it meant becoming the most efficient of communicators: advertisers, brand managers, and marketers using slogans and logos to speak on behalf of new products, or propagandists trumpeting the virtues of emerging states. Common to these efforts was a commitment to invention and the development of new languages and strategies, from photomontage to dynamic typography.

Over the course of five decades, Merrill Berman has brought together one of the most significant collections of early twentieth-century art, representing the avant-gardes of the period: Dada, Bauhaus, de Stijl, Constructivism, Futurism, and more. His remarkable collection highlights the roles of artists as citizens, media workers, advertisers, and activists, revealing links between fine art and graphic design and shedding light on collective activities and then-new channels for the circulation of ideas.

The Museum of Modern Art's 2018 acquisition of 324 works made in Europe and Russia—the core of Mr. Berman's holdings—has had a transformative impact on the Museum's curatorial departments. This addition to MoMA's collection is crucial in the context of our recent expansion and renewed ambition to share the most complex and vibrant stories of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries with our audiences. The works in the Merrill C. Berman Collection fill long-standing gaps in the Museum's holdings and help diversify and extend the histories we can now share—among them, those of the formidable achievements of women artists of the early twentieth century, and of avant-garde activities in Central and Eastern Europe. The collection compels us to reconsider long-held notions of center and periphery, and the close connections between artistic endeavors and political movements. And, significantly, it helps us to identify links between the radical experimentation of the early twentieth century and the art of our own time, encouraging provocative dialogues across eras.

As a number of the artists in the Berman Collection themselves made very clear, much of this work was not intended to be seen on the walls of museums, but rather was to be plastered along streets or in town plazas, or reproduced in newspapers or magazines. Whether politically inspired or commercially driven, the majority of these pieces were designed to communicate with a mass audience. What does it mean to exhibit them now in the galleries of The Museum of Modern Art? How, today, may we understand art that was so attuned to its own time? Can the turmoil of the city street, the shop, the journal, the monument, or sites of political protest pervade the Museum?

This extraordinary collection itself suggests something of an answer. As a collector, Mr. Berman has closely followed artists' interests, listened to their voices, represented their experiments, explored their friendships, cohorts, and networks. Through the works in the Berman Collection, audiences now have the opportunity to see civilization's problems through the eyes of artists and through their works, allowing the past to come alive. Furthermore, the art of the past gains new urgency in the context of the efforts of today's artists to reach out to a broad viewership through the newest mediums—tools with which they are inventing their own visual languages to confront our own most pressing issues, from migration to mass incarceration to climate change.

An acquisition of this scope and ambition is only possible through the encouragement, enthusiasm, and generosity of an entire community. We are indebted to Alice and Tom Tisch, and Ronald S. and Jo Carole Lauder for their decisive leadership. Alice Tisch, as the Chair of the Committee on Architecture and Design, and Marlene Hess, Chair of the Committee on Drawings and Prints, were crucial catalysts, inspiring members through the acquisition process. Marie-Josée Kravis provided early and guidance and, with Henry Kravis, offered crucial support, for which we are enormously appreciative. Sue and Edgar Wachenheim III, David Booth, Jack Shear, Daniel and Jane Och, The Orentreich Family Foundation, Emily Rauh Pulitzer, The Modern Women's Fund, David A. Dechman, and The International Council of The Museum of Modern Art offered extraordinarily generous, vital, and indispensible support. All understood the potential of making the works in the Berman Collection available to a broad public, and believed that MoMA should be their home. I extend my deep gratitude to them, as well as to Christophe Cherix, The Robert Lehman Chief Curator of Drawings and Prints, for spearheading this initiative with Jodi Hauptman, Senior Curator, and to Martino Stierli, The Philip Johnson Chief Curator of Architecture and Design, for his expert and thoughtful stewardship, with Juliet Kinchin, Curator, in bringing the collection here and envisioning how these works would expand the stories that MoMA's collection can tell. Chief Conservator Kate Lewis and her colleagues have been essential partners in helping us to better understand the materials and methods of the avant-gardes. Ramona Bannayan, Senior Deputy Director of Exhibitions and Collections; Todd Bishop, Senior Deputy Director of External Affairs; Patty Lipshutz, General Counsel; Nancy Adelson, Deputy General Counsel; Jan Postma, Chief Financial Officer; and Adrian Sudhalter, Research Curator, The Merrill C. Berman Collection, all facilitated this complex endeavor.

The Merrill C. Berman Collection at MoMA is wide-ranging, and offers countless possibilities for exhibition and publication. This book and exhibition project, *Engineer, Agitator, Constructor: The Artist Reinvented, 1918–1939*, is the first of these. Focusing on one dramatic aspect of the interwar period, it explores ways in which artists redefined themselves and their roles in a moment of enormous political, social, economic, and technological change. We are grateful for major support for this exhibition provided by The Modern Women's Fund and for the generous funding provided by The Dian Woodner Exhibition Endowment Fund. For their ongoing support of the Museum's programming, we are indebted to the lead donors of the Annual Exhibition Fund. With keen and infectious enthusiasm for art of the early twentieth century, Ronald S. and Jo Carole Lauder provided generous and vital support for this publication and its new and groundbreaking scholarship, which vividly demonstrate the avant-garde's profound impact on the early twentieth century and today.

GLENN D. LOWRY
The David Rockefeller Director,
The Museum of Modern Art

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The artists featured in this publication believed in the possibilities of the collective. As editors and curators, we, too, put great faith in collaborative efforts, and we are deeply grateful for the opportunity to work collectively with an extraordinarily talented and supportive group of colleagues, both in and outside The Museum of Modern Art.

We owe our greatest debt to Merrill C. Berman, who over the course of some fifty years has built a profoundly intelligent collection of early twentieth-century art and design. Long before meeting him, we knew of his legendary collection, which has done so much to shed light on the experimentation, political engagement, and complex fabric of avant-garde art of the interwar period. With a singular vision anticipating that of many museums, he included in his collecting purview lesser-known figures and locations once dismissed as peripheral and broke down barriers between art and design. His collection encompasses both one-of-a-kind objects and series of works representing artists' groups, illuminating networks of creative activity across Europe and Russia and beyond. Ever knowledgeable and passionate about the artists and works in his collection, he has with deep generosity mentored a generation of curators and scholars, urging us to look harder and think more broadly about the complexity of artistic practice as it relates to history.

Mr. Berman has long been a valued lender to exhibitions at The Museum of Modern Art. With this track record as a base, the Museum began discussions with him about acquiring the core of his extensive collection. We knew what an extraordinary resource it would offer to our public toward understanding some of the early twentieth-century's significant moments.

Our excitement in being able to bring this exceptional material to museumgoers is shared by Glenn D. Lowry, MoMA's David Rockefeller Director. We are grateful for his enthusiastic efforts on behalf of this undertaking, as well as of this publication and exhibition. He is joined by an exceptionally generous group of trustees—and by the Chairs and members of the Committees on Drawings and Prints and Architecture and Design—who recognized that the moment of the Museum's expansion offered the perfect opportunity to rethink early twentieth-century art narratives through this acquisition.

No one has been more steadfast in his commitment to the acquisition of the Merrill C. Berman Collection than Christophe Cherix, The Robert Lehman Foundation Chief Curator of Drawings and Prints. It has been a privilege to partner with him, and we have been fortunate to have his good counsel as we conceived this first foray into sharing the material here publicly. The acquisition was made jointly with the Museum's Department of Architecture and Design, under the dedicated leadership of Martino Stierli, The Philip Johnson Chief Curator, and benefited from the expertise of Juliet Kinchin, Curator, who also has been an extraordinarily generous partner on this exhibition and book. Martino and Juliet share a keen interest in the interwar period, and both contributed important scholarship to this publication. We owe enormous gratitude as well to others on the front line of this endeavor, including John Prochilo, Department Manager, Department of Drawings and Prints; Heidi Hirschl Orley, Curatorial Expansion Project Manager; and those who joined us early on to survey Mr. Berman's holdings: Barry Bergdoll, Meyer Schapiro Professor of Art History and Archaeology, Columbia University, and former Philip Johnson Chief Curator of MoMA's Department of Architecture and Design; Samantha Friedman, Associate Curator, Department of Drawings and Prints; and Cara Manes, Associate Curator, Department of Painting and Sculpture. Paul Galloway, Collection Specialist, Department of Architecture and Design, deserves a special acknowledgment for his contribution to making a place for the Berman Collection at MoMA. Our profound appreciation goes to Leah Dickerman, who, after meeting Mr. Berman as a graduate student and organizing a landmark exhibition from his collection in 1994—*Building the Collective: Soviet Graphic Design, 1917–1937*—sparked what would become the most enriching conversations between the collector and MoMA. We are fortunate to have had her participation throughout; her scholarship and thinking have been guiding lights.

The collective work on this collection has been wide-ranging, from physically integrating the art into MoMA's holdings to conceptualizing its role in the future. We are indebted to the Museum's senior leadership, who brought their exceptional resolve to all aspects of the project, no matter how complex. Peter Reed, Senior Deputy Director for Curatorial Affairs, encouraged our efforts to use the Berman Collection to generate new scholarship, while Ramona Bannayan, Senior Deputy Director of Exhibitions and Collections, was, as always, a sounding board and touchstone, helping us materialize our ambitions for the exhibition. We are grateful to Todd Bishop, Senior Deputy Director of External Affairs, and his team, who thoughtfully expanded our resources for the acquisition, publication, and exhibition; Patty Lipshutz, General Counsel, and Nancy Adelson, Deputy General Counsel, who brought clarity to any issue we raised; and James Gara, Chief Operating Officer, Jan Postma, Chief Financial Officer, and their colleagues who kept us on track.

The unflappable Sydney Briggs led the safe move of more than three hundred works from Mr. Berman's storage to MoMA; we are lucky to have her collaboration as Associate Registrar of Collections. To ensure a smooth transition, she worked alongside Steven Wheeler, Associate Registrar of Collections, and the staffs of the Department of Drawings and Prints, the Department of Architecture and Design, and the Department of Photography, including Emma Presler, Department Manager; David Moreno, Jeff White, and Pamela Popeson, Preparators; Emily Cushman, Kunbi Ohni, and Tasha Lutek, Collection Specialists. Andrew Gardner and Evangelos Kotsioris, Curatorial Assistants, generously shared their knowledge of art, architecture, and design of the interwar period. In Exhibition Planning and Administration, first Margaret Aldredge, Exhibition Manager, and then Maya Taylor, Exhibition and Budget Assistant, oversaw all aspects of the exhibition's logistics.

Once the Berman Collection arrived on Fifty-third Street, our colleagues in Imaging and Visual Resources—Robert Kastler, Director; Kurt Heumiller, Studio Production Manager; Paul Abbey, Preparator; Roberto Rivera, Production Assistant; Jennifer Sellar, Digital Asset Manager; and their intrepid photographer colleagues—ensured that they were beautifully photographed. Rob Jung, Manager, and Tom Krueger and Sarah Wood, Assistant Managers, Art Handling and Preparation, and their stellar team of preparators, all under the leadership of Stefanii Ruta-Atkins, Head Registrar of Collection Management and Exhibition Registration, made certain the works always looked their best, from storage to Museum wall.

One of the most exciting aspects of the Berman acquisition, publication, and exhibition has been working with our colleagues in MoMA's David Booth Conservation Department, led by Chief Conservator Kate Lewis. Lee Ann Daffner, Andrew W. Mellon Foundation Conservator of Photographs; Erika Mosier, Conservator; Laura Neufeld, Associate Conservator; and Chris McGlinchey, Sally and Michael Gordon Senior Conservation Scientist, all contributed essays or invalu-

able research to this publication and were our regular (often daily!) incisive interlocutors. We also thank Lynda Zycherman, Conservator, Anny Aviram, Senior Conservator, and Annie Wilker, Associate Conservator. It is not an exaggeration to say that each has made fantastic discoveries, and that every time we look together at these works with them, in our study center or in their lab, we learn something new and exciting about the collection that is now in our care. In bringing the Berman Collection to MoMA, our hope has been that the Museum would expand its already strong position as a center of conservation research on the art of the early twentieth century; through the talents and dedication of this department, we are already seeing amazing results.

How to make these works come alive for our public? How to show the ambition of artists finding their voices in a moment of change? These were our exhilarating challenges as the editors of this book and curators of the exhibition, and in that we are thankful every day to be working with talented exhibition designers, graphic designers, communications professionals, educators, publishers, editors, and writers. So many of the artists featured in this project made books themselves—sometimes experimenting with the book's very form—and it was critical for us to bring that spirit of inventiveness to this publication. On that front, we had the very good fortune to be joined by a group of esteemed scholars, conservators, and curators, who helped us study and think carefully about the Berman objects and what they tell us about the period in which they were created. Our aspiration in bringing this collection to MoMA was to make the Museum a hub of scholarship on the avant-gardes. In June 2019, we hosted a multiday convening in which the contributors to this publication gathered to look closely and discuss works, issues, and ideas, and the experience was a reminder of how careful looking can yield the most remarkable results. We are profoundly grateful for the commitment, generosity, and knowledge of those contributors, listed on page 285, who have enriched us, the Museum, readers, and the fields of art and design history in immeasurable ways.

MoMA's Publications team worked unstintingly on this book, and we thank Christopher Hudson, Publisher; Curtis R. Scott, Associate Publisher; Don McMahon, Editorial Director; Marc Sapir, Production Director—all of whom responded to numerous queries, often urgent, throughout the process. Our extraordinary editor, Diana Stoll, took on this complex project—thirty-four authors!—with aplomb and sensitivity to both writer and reader, making each sentence more precise or evocative, deepening our arguments, and advising on all matters of content and design, big and small. We are grateful for her efforts, and for the ongoing and excellent advice of Emily Hall, Editor. Designing a book that is about design is a daunting undertaking, and we are honored that NORM—Manuel Krebs, Dimitri Bruni, Ludovic Varone, Stefan Hürlemann—joined this endeavor. They have captured the artists' own enthusiasm for what El Lissitzky called the "book space"—one that can activate and involve the reader—and extended that historical sense of experimentation and dynamism into the present. Matthew Pimm, Production Manager, translated our collective vision into reality, ensuring the success and beauty of the end product. We are also grateful to Hannah Kim, Business and Marketing Manager; Naomi Falk, Rights Coordinator; and Sophie Golub, Department Manager, for overseeing the publication's practical and promotional logistics.

"Dynamic" is a word that is often used to describe the art of the interwar period, and that description equally applied to the approach of Mack Cole-Edelsack, Senior Design Manager, who brought his dynamic energy to the process of designing the exhibition and taught us so much about space and flow. We have been fortunate to work with his expert and exceedingly kind colleagues in the Department of Exhibition Design and Production: Lana Hum, Director; L.J. McNerney, Assistant Production Manager; Alexandra Diczok, Department Coordinator; and Ben Akhavan, Design Assistant. We had fruitful brainstorming sessions with colleagues in the Digital Media and Audio Visual Departments, who thought through with us ways to use technology in the galleries: Shannon Darrough, Director; Jackie Cruz, Department Manager; Aaron Louis, Director; Aaron Harrow, Design Manager; and Mike Gibbons, Exhibitions Foreperson.

With their experimentation with then-young media—film, photography, radio—and their ambitions to reach a mass audience, the artists in the Berman Collection have much in common with MoMA's innovative Communications and Creative Teams, led by Amanda Hicks, Director of Communications and Public Affairs; Rob Baker, Director, Creative Team; and Rob Giampietro, Director of Design. Sara Beth Walsh, Communications Manager, intelligently oversaw the exhibition's outreach. Our colleagues in Design—Elle Kim, Senior Art Director; Olya Domorodova, Senior Designer; David Klein, Senior Designer; and Claire Corey, Production Manager—were inspiringly enthusiastic and imaginative in their approach to the practices of artists of the interwar period. We often thought about what those artists might have done with our own new forms of media outreach, such as MoMA's video channels and its online *Magazine*, which our team employed to convey how artists stepped out of the studio and into the street. We thank our colleagues in the Creative Team for their efforts and their wide-ranging ideas: Leah Dickerman, Director, Editorial and Content Strategy; Prudence Peiffer, Managing Editor; Rebecca Stokes, Director, Marketing Campaigns and Audience Development; Wendy Olson, Marketing Manager; Isabel Custodio, Content Producer; and Natasha Giliberti, Video Producer.

The artists here understood that ambitious projects depend on equally determined support. We owe thanks to our colleagues in Development: Meagan Johnson, Director of Institutional Giving and Development Operations; Olivia Mitchell, Associate Director; Sylvia Renner, Assistant Director of International Funding; Caralynn Sandorf, Director, Major Gifts and Campaign; Anna Luisa Vallifuoco, Manager, and Jessica Smith, Assistant Director, Institutional Giving and Global Partnerships; and former Development Officer Alice Van Arsdale. Crucial outreach was undertaken by Maggie Lyko, Director of Special Events and Affiliate Programs, and Jessie Cappello, Events Coordinator, Special Programming and Events. Jay Levenson, Director, and Marta Dansie, Department Coordinator, International Program, offered indispensable advice.

The Museum's educators have been intrigued by the expansive stories this collection provides, and they have developed programming in conjunction with this exhibition that connects the issues of the interwar period to our own. We are indebted to Wendy Woon, Deputy Director for Education, and her devoted team: Sara Bodinson, Director, and Jenna Madison, Assistant Director, Interpretation, Research and Digital Learning; Pablo Helguera, Director, Adult and Academic Education; Sarah Kennedy, Assistant Director, Learning Programs and Partnerships; Jess Van Nostrand, Assistant Director, Exhibition Programs and Gallery Initiatives; Adelia Gregory, Associate Educator, Public Programs and Gallery Initiatives; Alethea Rockwell, Associate Educator, Studio and Artist Programs; Rachell Morillo, Assistant Educator; Isa Saldana, Public Programs Fellow; Hannah Fagin, Coordinator, Adult and Academic Programs; and Eleni Riga, 12-Month Intern. It is exciting to imagine the ways in which visitors will interact with the ideas they encounter in the Berman Collection, and we appreciate the initiative of Jennifer Tobias, Reader Services Librarian, Department of Archives, Library, and Research Collections, MoMA; and Ellen Lupton, Curator of Contemporary Design, Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum, New York, and Founding Director of the Graphic Design MFA program at Maryland Institute College of Art, Baltimore, in exploring the possibilities.

Over the course of many years of thinking about the Merrill C. Berman Collection, we have had the unwavering encouragement of our colleagues in other curatorial departments. We are thankful for their collaboration as we developed the exhibition, which also includes works that have long been part of MoMA's holdings—thus demonstrating the perfect marriage of two great collections. In the Department of Painting and Sculpture, we are grateful for the guidance of Ann Temkin, The Marie-Josée and Henry Kravis Chief Curator; Michelle Kuo, The Marlene Hess Curator of Painting and Sculpture (who also provided essential bibliography); Anne Umland, The Blanchette Hooker Rockefeller Senior Curator; Lilian Tone, Assistant Curator; Lily Goldberg, Collection Specialist; and Charlotte Healy, Research Assistant. In the Department of Photography, Sarah Meister, Curator, has been a dream collaborator, with her deep knowledge and wise counsel at the ready, and Jane Pierce, Research Assistant, responded to numerous questions. Stuart Comer, The Lonti Ebers Chief Curator of Media and Performance, was enthusiastic from the start, finding important and intriguing points of connection between artists of the interwar period and those of today. We are indebted also to Ana Janevski and Thomas Lax, Curators, and Lizzie Gorfaine, Assistant Director and Producer, Performance and Live Programs. We are delighted to be working closely with our colleagues in the Department of Film, led by Rajendra Roy, The Celeste Bartos Chief Curator, on an accompanying film program organized by Olivia Priedite, Department Assistant, and advised by Josh Siegel, Curator. Equally important sources for this project were found in the Museum's Department of Archives, Library, and Research Collections; this project is all the better for the many (and sometimes obscure) questions answered by Michelle Elligott, Chief; Michelle Harvey, The Rona Roob Head of Archives Services; and their amazing colleagues at the reference desk.

This ambitious acquisition and scholarly project required a great deal of collaboration with colleagues and friends beyond our Museum's walls. For essential advice, we are indebted to: Adam Boxer; Masha Chlenova, independent curator and faculty, Eugene Lang College of Liberal Arts, The New School, New York; David Crowley, School of Visual Culture, National College of Art and Design, Dublin; Meghan Forbes, former MoMA C-MAP Fellow; Maria Gough, Joseph Pulitzer, Jr., Professor of Modern Art, Harvard University; Daniel Hackbarth; Christina Kiaer, Associate Professor, Department of Art History, Northwestern University; Juliet Koss, Gabrielle Jungels-Winkler Professor of the History of Architecture and Art at Scripps College, Claremont, California; Mikhail Krasnov, International Department, Multimedia Art Museum, Moscow; Paulina Kurc-Maj, Head, Department of Modern Art Collection, Muzeum Sztuki, Łódź; Alexander Lavrentiev; Nicola Lucchi, Queens College; Angelica Zander Rudenstine; Nicholas Sawicki, Associate Professor of Art History, Lehigh University; Sarah Scaturro, Conservator, the Metropolitan Museum of Art Costume Institute; Alexander Shedrinsky; Mienke Simon Thomas, Senior Curator of Decorative Arts and Design, Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam; and Andrés Mario Zervigón, Professor of the History of Photography, Rutgers University. For sharing key research and resources, we thank: Dilya Rudenko and Elena Girich of the A. A. Bakhrushin Theatre Museum, Moscow; Gwen Breedijk, RKD (Netherlands Institute for Art History); Adam Monohon, Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona; Adam Varkonyi, Budapest Poster Gallery; Katya Rogatchevskaia, The British Library; Ksenia Vladimirova, Gorky Park Museum; Ali Rosenfeld, former Curator of Russian and European Art, Mead Art Museum, Amherst College; Laurence Senelick, Tufts University; Sergey Koluzakov, Moscow State University of Geodesy and Cartography; Marianna Evstratova, International Academy of Architecture, Moscow; Anna Pravdová, National Gallery in Prague; and Masha Shpolberg, Wellesley College.

We are enormously grateful as well for invaluable translations by Bela Shayevich, Klara Kemp-Welch, Anastasiya Osipova, and Dominick Lawton. Carina Kitzenmaier and Erika Babatz, Bauhaus-Archiv/Museum für Gestaltung, Berlin, and Karin Weckman, Schriefers Design Collection, University of Wuppertal, advised at critical moments on image permissions.

We are profoundly thankful for the unwavering support of this project's home bases: Dalia Berman and Lisa Berman, of Merrill C. Berman's lovely family, who are involved in his collection; his ever-gracious and professional assistant, Jolie Simpson; and his former assistant Joelle Jensen. In MoMA's Department of Drawings and Prints we thank Starr Figura and Sarah Suzuki, Curators; Inés Katzenstein, Curator of Latin American Art and Director of the Patricia Phelps de Cisneros Research Institute for the Study of Art from Latin America; Esther Adler, Associate Curator; Christian Rattemeyer, former Associate Curator; Bernadette Fitzgerald, Department Assistant; and Maggie Birnbaum, Assistant to the Chief Curator. Hillary Reder, Curatorial Assistant, efficiently handled a host of last-minute questions and meticulously compiled our index. We so appreciate the efforts of Alicia Russo, Department Assistant, who valiantly completed the index, and was always sensitive to the balance between the needs of the project and everything else. Thanks also go to 2019–20 Louise Bourgeois 12-Month Intern Alexandra Adams and to our helpful interns Galina Stefadu and Juliana Garcia. Cataloguing these works has been a massive effort, presenting challenges in terms of research, style, and approach. Margot Yale, Cataloguer, laid out key guidelines from the start, and Sewon Kang, Senior Cataloguer, then took the lead, upholding the highest levels of clarity and consistency. This project and future users of the Merrill C. Berman Collection are indebted to them.

In the spirit of Soviet Russia's penchant for giving catchy titles to collective endeavors, we might say we have been extraordinarily fortunate with our "Berman Brigade"—a stellar curatorial team of comrades. We have learned and benefited enormously from the dedication of Barbora Bartunkova, 2018–2019 Mellon-Marron Research Consortium Fellow; Sarah Rapoport, Louise Bourgeois 12-Month Intern; and Jane Cavalier, Curatorial Assistant. Their sharp research skills have expanded our understanding of individual objects in the Berman Collection, and have enriched the field of early twentieth-century art history; their bold and creative ideas have indelibly shaped the approach taken by this book and exhibition. While we were only lucky enough to have Barbora and Sarah with us briefly, Jane has been the consistent presence on the project: she is an engaged and thoughtful interlocutor, who gamely faced every challenge with composure and professionalism, keeping the research and production phases on track and bringing us to the finish line.

When the artists featured in this project moved outside their studios to engage a mass audience, they did not do so alone. Their writings, letters, and contemporary photographs show that they worked with the support of collaborators and partners. No matter the energy of the crowd and the collective, those personal relationships, especially that of families, offer crucial sustenance. This is true for us as well.

JODI HAUPTMAN
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PREFACE

THE MERRILL C. BERMAN COLLECTION

A SHADOW MUSEUM BROUGHT TO LIGHT

In October 2017 I found myself driving to the town of Rye, New York. The purpose of the trip was to sit down with Merrill Berman—owner of a collection of early avant-garde materials of almost mythic proportions—in the hope of coming to an agreement that would make The Museum of Modern Art the new home of some of his most cherished possessions. For decades, Merrill's collection had been an open secret in the art world: works from it had been included in inspiring exhibitions at venues such as the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis, Columbia University and the Cooper Hewitt Smithsonian Design Museum in New York, and Williams College in Massachusetts. In 2011–12 the Fundación Juan March presented a string of captivating exhibitions throughout Spain, drawing from Merrill's collection to focus on lesser-known figures of the Russian avant-garde and on themes such as photomontage, graphic design, and typography in early twentieth-century art. His collection had also been featured in exhibitions at MoMA since the late 1990s with close to metronomic regularity: *Aleksandr Rodchenko* in 1998, *Dada* in 2006, *Bauhaus, 1919–1933: Workshops for Modernity* in 2009–10, *Inventing Abstraction, 1910–1925* in 2012–13, and *Dadaglobe Reconstructed* in 2016.

Merrill, who was born in Boston in 1938, grew up in a family that collected American antiques. Early on—perhaps inspired by trips he took as a young man with his father to rallies of the Democratic Party—he began acquiring political memorabilia. Later in his life, in the 1970s, alongside his day job as a financial investor, he turned to graphic arts as the principal focus of his collection. Unlike most collectors at the time, however, Merrill had a passion for graphic works that were not necessarily American, unique, or decorative. He collected what few others were paying attention to: posters, magazines, photomontages, original maquettes, collages, propaganda materials, postcards, advertisements—mostly produced in Europe and Russia in the early years of the twentieth century. As he began to identify such materials with the help of an ever-expanding network of international dealers, he discovered that he had limited competition—even for works of the utmost rarity. While public institutions would have been his logical competitors, Merrill realized, as he has said, that "the museum community was way too segmented by departments and by areas."[1]

The focal period of Merrill's interdisciplinary collection—the 1910s to the 1930s—represents a moment of true internationalization of the art world. It was also during these decades that many long-held perceptions about art were thrown into question, from the customary hierarchy of art mediums to the role of the artist in society. It did not take long for Merrill to see that, in order to capture the uniqueness of that period, he needed not only to act fast—the works that interested him were extremely fragile and not actively being preserved—but also to look at multiple epicenters at the same time, such as Amsterdam, Dessau, Zurich, Budapest, and Moscow.

■

When the young Alfred Barr, soon to become the founding director of The Museum of Modern Art, arrived in Moscow in the winter of 1927 during his first visit to Russia, he felt "as if this were the most important place in the world for us to be."[2] He quickly determined, however, that the extraordinary creative energy emanating from the city had little to do with abstract painting, which he had come in the hopes of seeing. Instead of looking at contemporary painting and sculpture, Barr spent most of his time in the Soviet Union visiting churches and museums during the days and watching films and theater productions by the likes of Sergei Eisenstein and Vsevolod Meyerhold in the evenings. When he did visit studios, he was told by artists such as El Lissitzky and Aleksandr Rodchenko that painting had become a distraction, or was a thing of the past. In the following years, Barr was to assemble at MoMA the most formidable collection of Russian avant-garde art outside the Soviet Union—but his focus for the Museum was decidedly on abstraction. By contrast, Merrill, always interested in the relation between artists and political movements, stayed away from painting and sculpture and concentrated on figurative practices, objects of mass reproducibility, and the applied arts.

Despite significant acquisitions by MoMA over the years—from the Jan Tschichold Collection (1937, 1950) to the Thomas Walther Collection (2001, 2017) and The Judith Rothschild Foundation Gift (2001)—it became clearer and clearer, as curators took a deeper dive into the Merrill C. Berman Collection, how complementary it was in relation to the Museum's holdings. Merrill, who describes himself as a "consistent and relentless" collector, had often sought out specifically whatever the Museum had *not* considered—such as unique works that brought light to the emergence of photomontage as a new medium in the early twentieth century. And yet, early in his life as a collector, Merrill had sought advice from the Museum. In a 2011 interview, he spoke of an exchange with Mildred Constantine, design curator at MoMA through the 1950s and '60s, who discouraged him from putting his collecting energies toward political materials. "This was the Brezhnev era," he recalled. "Art people were intimidated by images of Lenin and Stalin, especially Stalin . . . so I was told to just stay [away] from it and that it was secondary in terms of importance. So I said to myself, 'This can't be right.' I was ever the contrarian."[3]

■

As I drove north from the city for my meeting with Merrill in 2017, it occurred to me that the centennial of the Russian Revolution was coming up. I wondered what was on his mind. I could only guess that what mattered most to him at this moment was that his collection should be recognized as transformative for MoMA's holdings today—just as the works in it were in their own era.

At around the same time, the Museum was undergoing its own transformation. It was almost exactly two years before the opening of what has come to be referred to as the "new MoMA," as much for its augmented gallery space as for its new curatorial approach. MoMA's curators had put forward three fundamental goals for the Museum's new incarnation: to bring together artistic disciplines that had traditionally been kept separate, to improve the gender representation of the artists on view, and to embrace a broader geographic and ethnic diversity than in the past. The galleries had come to no longer express the deeper complexities of the Museum's collection, but instead showcased a rather narrow twentieth-century ideological construct depicting art-making as a linear sequence of practices leading neatly from one to the next. However comfortable such a view might have seemed to some, it was clearly untenable in an era of mass communication when, to borrow artist Adrian Piper's razor-sharp expression, you can't "pretend not to know what you know" anymore.

Many of the necessary remedies were, not unlike Merrill's collection, hidden in plain sight. From the Museum's reserves, curators uncovered forgotten histories, in which men's and women's accomplishments, figuration and abstraction, and contributions from regions outside Europe and the United States were much more interwoven than museum-goers might have imagined visiting MoMA's galleries twenty or thirty years ago. There was, however, a long list of important and influential artists who had been collected only sporadically, or not all. From that list emerged a new roadmap for the collection and for future exhibitions.

From the beginning, Merrill has built his collection with the rigor, ambition, and depth typically associated with institutions. His holdings have the breadth and complexity to contextualize artists' practices in relationship to one another. He has had the prescience and boldness to elevate types of work often not fully recognized as art—such as typographic experiments, mass-produced ephemera, and photo-collage. No collector has done more than Merrill to restore the credit owed to the women of the avant-garde, whose work he has avidly collected for decades. Finally, his holdings represent a truly transnational project, according the same attention to Poland or Czechoslovakia as to France or Italy. His collection fills in so many blanks in the long-dominant picture of art history, and draws together many threads in this complex story.

■

When I arrived in Rye, I parked my car in front of the office building where the collection is housed and went inside to meet with Merrill. It crossed my mind that the building in a former life used to be the headquarters of the Continental Baking Company (makers of the famous Twinkie, among other things), and how ironic it was that it now contained thousands of outstanding works of art. Merrill had acted all those years, as he himself put it, as "a chief curator with a shadow museum."[4] To my surprise—despite the many and sometimes extensive conversations the Museum had had over the years with him about the future of his collection—our discussion was very quick. It was time for MoMA to catch up with Merrill, and for Merrill to let his works join the ranks of a broader history.

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1. Merrill C. Berman, in "Doing the Right Job Is Never Ending: An Interview with Merrill C. Berman," in Fontán del Junco and Deborah Roldán, *The Merrill C. Berman Collection at the Fundación Juan March* (Madrid: Fundación Juan March, 2012), p. 19.
2. Alfred H. Barr, Jr., "Russian Diary, 1927–28," *October* 7, "Soviet Revolutionary Culture" (Winter 1978): 12.
3. Berman, in "Doing the Right Job Is Never Ending," p. 19.
4. Ibid., p. 22.

JODI HAUPTMAN

A man dressed in the uniform of a soldier—heavy-belted jacket with open collar and two patch pockets, matching trousers tucked into knee-high socks in ankle boots, patterned ascot—stands at attention, his left hand raised in the air. Is it a salute? A greeting? A response to a question? An appeal to be counted? Whether demanding or requesting attention, this hand is one of many in this work, made around 1930 by the graphic artist, typographer, and photomonteur Nikolai Sedelnikov (plate 1). It is the letterpress, likely final version of a set of photomontaged designs proposed for the cover of an advertising magazine (plates 2, 3).[1] Positioned in a dark nowhere, our figure is backlit by another hand—this one luminous, dematerialized—that echoes the position and outline of his own. For this photogram, Sedelnikov would have likely laid his own hand on light-sensitive paper and exposed it to a light source to create a bright white silhouette. There are no anatomical details, just the familiar shape (the wrist's position, slightly askew, indicates that in making the photogram Sedelnikov placed his hand at a slight angle across the sheet). With one hand similarly (though not exactly) positioned in front of the other, the luminous large one seems to be a projection of the smaller, like the shadow play of silhouettes on the wall of a child's room. There is, however, a reversal here. That childhood combination of light source and hand would create a dark shadow; what we see is all light, except for the darkness around the fingers' edges that provides a hint of dimensionality. Although shadow play has a long history—think of Plato's description of captives' visions on the walls of a cave—here the reference is contemporary: to cinema, one of a host of new technologies that Sedelnikov calls out via the subject and the form of this work. In fact, although the repetition of the hand provides the composition's visual rhythm, the work itself is all about an assault on the hand's traditional function, as an emblem of making, the signal of something handcrafted, a stand-in for the artist.[2]

Nestled in and creeping through the fingers—overtaking the photogram—are images cut from printed matter, depicting tools of industrial production and reproduction that ultimately superseded the hand and the handmade. Between thumb and forefinger, a crowd is pasted in front of a factory; echoing the smokestacks behind them, the individuals in the group extend the visual theme by raising their own hands, creating an endless echo and a transformation of individual response into a collective reverberation. Between the index and middle finger is a tractor, signifying the dominance of mechanized agriculture. Next is Moscow's Shukhov radio tower (built 1920–22), its vertical lattice structure topped by an antenna that rhymes with the tallest finger; its role in mass communication and specifically the messaging of the state emphasized by the addition of two megaphones, with the Cyrillic letters for USSR clearly visible. Finally, in the space between the fourth and fifth fingers is a self-reflexive moment within the work: an industrial printing press, the mechanical producer of Sedelnikov's design, churns out copies of the very image we are examining. Sheets are propelled into the composition's space by the action of the press; they twist and turn as they float through the air.

Sedelnikov's process in constructing this work presents its own challenge to traditional artistic creation. Although cut and pasted in place by hand, the images themselves were mechanically produced—whether via printing technologies or in the darkroom—and,

NIKOLAI SEDELNIKOV
(Russian, 1905–1994)
1 *Advertising Technique 1* (*Tekhnika reklamy 1*), 1930
Design for journal cover
Letterpress
11¾ × 9⅛" (29.8 × 23 cm)

NIKOLAI SEDELNIKOV
(Russian, 1905–1994)
2 *Advertising Technique 1* (*Tekhnika reklamy 1*), 1930
Design for journal cover
Gelatin silver print with Cut-and-pasted gelatin silver prints, printed paper, and gouache
9⅜ × 6⅞" (23.8 × 17.4 cm)

NIKOLAI SEDELNIKOV
(Russian, 1905–1994)
3 *Advertising Technique 2* (*Tekhnika reklamy 2*), 1930
Design for journal cover
Cut-and-pasted gelatin silver prints and printed paper on board with gouache and pencil
12⅛ × 9¼" (30.7 × 23.5 cm)

juxtaposed with stenciled letters, there is little evidence of the hand's labor. If Sedelnikov rejects the primacy of the hand here, he also signals the unseating and reinvention of the traditional artist—the replacement of handicraft with production, creation that is mechanical and industrial, reproducible (and made from reproductions), and directed to a mass audience—that by 1930, when Sedelnikov completed this work, had long been underway all across Europe and Russia. Such widespread reinvention of the role of the artist and the functions of art took place in lockstep with the era's shifts in industry, technology, and labor and amid the profound impact of momentous events: World War I, the Russian Revolution and civil war, the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the rise of fascism. The central questions being asked then parallel almost uncannily those we face today in the twenty-first century: in the context of massive upheaval, displacement of populations, far-reaching technological change, the establishment of new forms of government and new kinds of commerce, and an expanded media culture, what does it mean to be an artist? Does an artist even have a right to exist? On what basis? In what form?[3]

Attempts to answer these pressing questions are found throughout the art and theoretical writings of the early twentieth-century avant-gardes in the interwar period, 1918–39. Whether connected to Dada, Bauhaus, de Stijl, Russian Constructivism, or Futurism, many artists responded to changed conditions by abandoning easel painting and the privacy of their studios to step out into the street, participate in collective activities, and engage a wide public—whether for political or commercial ends. But what would this new artist be called? This was Soviet critic Viktor Pertsov's question as he noted the close proximity of technology to artistic practice. "An engineer—of words, an engineer-musician, an engineer-decorator, etc.," he mused.[4] The Latvian-born artist Gustav Klutsis sidestepped the precision (and perhaps the limitations) of nomenclature, defining himself as an "artist of an entirely new type."[5] More important, Klutsis articulated a set of answers to these questions, justifying the artist's right and necessity to exist under changed conditions, the new kind of work that must be made, and the viewers that should be engaged. Klutsis explained that this "artist of an entirely new type" is "a public person, a specialist in political and cultural work with the masses, a constructor who has mastered photography, who can build a composition using entirely new principles that have not hitherto been used in art."[6]

The characteristics Klutsis identified—the focus on public address, an engagement with one's own times, the deployment of photography (and by extension other mediums suited to mass distribution), and the invention of new strategies—summarize the approach of many Soviet and European artists in the interwar period who were similarly rethinking their roles, looking toward new forms of industry or technology, taking on non-art-related jobs, launching businesses that communicated with broad audiences, and organizing fellow cultural workers into collective action. These "engineers," "agitators," "constructors," "advertisers," "workers," "impresarios"—designations that these artists often adopted for themselves—turned away from traditional forms of painting and sculpture and invented new visual languages while working as propagandists, brand managers, publishers, editors, curators. They engaged in novel ways with expanded audiences and established new infrastructures for the presentation and dissemination of their work. These artists actively engaged the social, and considered and reconsidered their own positions as protestors, workers, mouthpieces for new regimes or activists against them. Reflecting Klutsis's call for "entirely new principles" and his fellow Constructivist Aleksandr Rodchenko's belief that "everything is experiment," photographic and typographic inventions were seen in posters and on city billboards, in books and periodicals, and on the walls of galleries and museums. As Rodchenko put it: "The street, the square, the city and the whole world. . . . The art of the future . . . will be just as indispensible as 48-storey skyscrapers, gigantic bridges, the wireless telegraph, aeronautics, submarines, and so forth."[7]

New Typography's diagonals, the marriage of letterforms and photography in "typophoto," and the striking and often contrasting combinations of photomontage all persuasively reflected the modern moment.[8] Photomontage especially played a decisive role in this period as perhaps *the* crucial visual language of the early twentieth century. Photomonteurs took advantage of the explosion of what were then new mediums, cutting up and pasting together bits of printed photographic and widely circulated images.[9] The results were works that directly connected or responded to current events: in their bold collisions and juxtapositions, in their deployment of photographs of crowds and striding leaders, in their presentation of laborers, cities, and factories, and in their utopian hopes for new technologies, these photomonteurs captured the spirit of a new age.

By using photomontage to join mechanization to mass communication—factory and tractor linked to radio, photograph, cinema, and printing press—Sedelnikov offered one visualization of the terms of such reinvention. His comrade Vasili Elkin went a step further, not only defining image making as production, but completely fusing artist/maker with the industrial

printing press (plate 4). Elkin's mustachioed figure with proletarian cap looks seriously into the distance as his frame stretches tautly upward with feet planted on the ground, forming an *x*. Although he gives the appearance of strength, his body is devoid of bones or muscles; instead, he is constructed solely of cut-and-pasted images of wheels, gears, and cylinders, scaffolding and ladders, winding sheets of printed material—all elements of the factory-scale printing press. Redoubling his own form is the machine that he hoists grandly, formally, and even ritualistically into the air: a full view of an enormous multicylinder press, all of which makes this figure more impressive and more impactful and more keyed to its time than any equestrian statue of the past. Today, as Elkin demonstrates, the artist is a producer: a creator and distributor, directing his efforts to a mass audience.[10]

Gathering close readings of works—drawings, propaganda, advertising, exhibition display, typography, books, journals, and theater design—and focusing on the new roles of the artists who created them, *Engineer, Agitator, Constructor: The Artist Reinvented, 1918–1939* offers a consideration of the critical effects of political, economic, and social change on visual culture, the importance of collectivity over individual authors, and the impact of mass media and advances in photomechanical reproduction. Importantly, this volume also illuminates the essential roles of women in avant-garde activities, while mapping vital networks of image makers, curators, publishers, and designers across Europe, connecting key city centers: Berlin to Warsaw, Prague to Budapest, Paris to Moscow, Rome and Milan to Amsterdam. The result of such redefinitions of artistic practice, this book argues, was a reorientation of the work of art itself from painting to production, or, as one contemporary critic put it, a move "from easel to machine."[11]

Engineer, Agitator, Constructor showcases approaches to the reinvention of the artist. Many rethought their roles by aligning themselves with industry. The Polish artist Henryk Berlewi, for example, exhibited his abstract drawings in an Austro-Daimler automobile showroom in Warsaw, proposing an equivalence between the dynamism promised by the car's engine and the dynamism of repeating shapes, between what he termed "Mechano-Facture" and the contemporary manufacturer. Others focused on a more public address, including Liubov Popova, who redeployed the language of her abstract painting into agitational theater; Maria Bri-Bein, whose posters offered new ways for women to be producers and consumers in Soviet society; and Lydia Naumova, who combined statistical charts with color and energetic form to bring to life the history and currency of the Soviet trade-union movement.

The field of advertising grew in these years with advances in technologies of mechanical reproduction, and with the formation of dedicated agencies, trade fairs, and journals; this arena, too, was exploited for its newly expanded public remit. During an experimental early moment in the young Soviet Union, when capitalist-style enterprise was briefly sanctioned, the artist Rodchenko and the poet Vladimir Mayakovsky joined forces to create product advertisements with captivating graphics and evocative, agitational slogans. Mayakovsky's texts for such products as light bulbs, chocolate, and cooking oil, and Rodchenko's use of vibrant color and lively typography, exemplify their remarkable efforts to find a productive and public role for a poet and artist in the Soviet Union's new society, and to invent strategies for putting language and image in the service of the state.[12] Other ad agencies were founded by artists Max Burchartz, César Domela-Nieuwenhuis, Bruno Munari, and Kurt Schwitters, while at the Bauhaus advertising and branding were essential aspects of the school's curriculum and publishing program.[13]

Likewise, journal-making was a crucial new avenue of engagement. Artists worked as publishers and editors, creating regional communities while reaching out across national borders, especially evident in the activities of Lajos Kassák in Hungary and Teresa Żarnower and Mieczysław Szczuka in Poland. Local and global politics were reflected in these journals, and agitation is seen throughout this volume, from the photomontaged posters and book covers by Elkin, Klutsis, and Sedelinikov, along with works by Valentina Kulagina, Mikhail Razulevich, Varvara Stepanova, and many others in the Soviet Union, to John Heartfield in Germany, who energetically condemned National Socialism and fascism by combining found images to create charged meanings.

Some works in this selection reveal the political climate in troubling ways. For example, a practitioner of photomontage, the Bauhaus-trained Werner David Feist submitted a poster proposal for the municipal pools in his home city of Augsburg with a new kind of design that combined photography with graphics (plate 138). Although he won the competition, as a Jewish person he would soon not be allowed to swim in the pools that his own poster advertised.[14] Fré Cohen, also Jewish, worked (illegally) as a graphic designer during the Nazi occupation of the Netherlands; when she was arrested in 1943, she committed suicide.

VASILI ELKIN
4 Design related to poster for the magazine *Poligraficheskoe proizvodstvo* (Polygraphic production), c. 1928
Cut-and-pasted printed and colored paper on paper with pencil
22 1/16 × 16 9/16" (56 × 42 cm)

Indeed, the utopias that many of these revolutionary movements promised often came to brutal ends, a failure that must be acknowledged too. The Futurism, for example, that captured Munari's imagination as a young man—his faith in the possibilities of the airplane and the engine can be seen in these pages (plates 187 and 191)—eventually allied itself with fascism, while many Soviet artists who embraced and promoted Stalin's programs were eventually shut out by Socialist Realism or were victims of government purges.

The artists represented in this collection were determined to act as social agents in a period of dizzying political, social, and economic turmoil and transformation, to redefine their roles as public actors in the context of advances in image making and reproduction and mass media—conditions that have much in common with those of artists working in the twenty-first century. Then as now, many artists were driven by an imperative to invent new forms in response to untenable societal circumstances—from war to revolution, displacement to economic collapse. They explored new creative means in an effort to capture the attention of an increasingly mobile and distracted mass audience through scale, forceful graphics, and dynamic integration of text and image, and via once-unimaginable avenues of distribution. Their endeavors and aspirations are paralleled in the work of countless artists today, who have at their disposal new digital tools and immeasurably expansive networks, and who are asking the same urgent questions: What are the mediums and strategies available now that best allow us to speak to this moment? What does it mean to be an artist?

The works in the Merrill C. Berman Collection at The Museum of Modern Art represent a range of efforts by artists and designers of the interwar period, and may serve as valuable touchstones for makers of today and the future. Not surprisingly, the words of the artists themselves best articulate what was, and is still, at stake. For Stepanova, "the essential nature of artistic activity" must shift from the "representation of the spirit of things to conscious action." "New tasks," Klutsis tells us, call "for new types and new forms of art." Or as Mayakovsky asserted, with the heady optimism of a revolutionary: "We will remake life anew—right down to the last button on your vest."[15]

■

Exploring artists' self-reinvention in the period from 1918 to 1939—from the close of World War I to the outbreak of World War II—this volume opens with Adrian Sudhalter's investigation into the tensions between the maker's individual voice and his or her obligations to the collective, as embodied in the concept of the "constructor," one of the primary terms with which artists of this era redefined themselves. The core of this book is a collection of thirty-two essays by a roster of eminent scholars, conservators, poets, and artists, each addressing an object or group of objects from the Berman Collection at MoMA. Within the structure of the book, these considerations begin in the Soviet Union—which played such a determinative role in the era's trends—and continue westward through Europe. Finally, Juliet Kinchin, Curator in MoMA's Department of Architecture and Design, offers a consideration of the reception of graphics from the early twentieth century to today as a subject of study, collection, and display at the Museum. Along with these texts are quotations from the artists featured in the book: reminders of their aspirations, their ambitions, and the challenges they faced in the course of reinventing their function as creators.

Note: All illustrated works in this volume, unless otherwise noted, are in the Merrill C. Berman Collection at The Museum of Modern Art.

1. This magazine seems never to have been published.
2. It is worth noting that the hand makes numerous appearances in photomontage works of this period. For examples in this volume, see plates 80, 150, 154, 156. For a broader discussion of the hand as an "activated visual call" in this period, see Stephanie D'Alessandro, "Through the Eye and the Hand: Constructing Space, Constructing Vision in the Work of Moholy-Nagy," *Moholy-Nagy: Future Present*, ed. Matthew S. Witkovsky, Carol S. Eliel, and Karole P. B. Vail (Chicago: Art Institute of Chicago, 2016), pp. 61–68.
3. In considering the reinvention of the artist's role in the interwar period and these questions, the author and this project are indebted to the scholarship of Maria Gough; see especially *The Artist as Producer: Russian Constructivism in Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005) and "Back in the USSR: John Heartfield, Gustavs Klucis, and the Medium of Soviet Propaganda," *New German Critique*, no. 107 (Summer 2009): 133–83. See also Walter Benjamin's "The Author as Producer," *Reflections*, ed. and with an introduction by Peter Demetz, trans. Edmund Jephcott (New York: Schocken, 1986), pp. 220–38.; and Hubertus Gassner, "The Constructivists: Modernism on the Way to Modernization," in *The Great Utopia: The Russian and Soviet Avant-Garde, 1915–1932* (New York: Guggenheim Museum, 1992), pp. 298–319. See Leah Dickerman, "The Propagandizing of Things," in *Aleksandr Rodchenko*, ed. Magdalena Dabrowski, Dickerman, and Peter Galassi (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1998), pp. 62–99, and "The Fact and the Photograph," *October*, no. 118 (Fall 2006): 132–52.
4. Viktor Pertsov, "At the Junction of Art and Production" (1922); in *Russian Art of the Avant-Garde: Theory and Criticism, 1902–1934*, ed. and trans. John Bowlt (New York: Viking, 1976), p. 236.
5. Gustavs Klucis [note the Latvian spelling in this source], "Photomontage as a New Kind of Agitation Art" (1931), in *Photomontage between the Wars, 1918–1939: Selections from the Merrill C. Berman Collection*, with essay by Adrian Sudhalter (Madrid and Ottawa: Fundación Juan March; Carlton University Art Gallery, 2012), p. 117.
6. Ibid.
7. Aleksandr Rodchenko, "Everything Is Experiment" (1921); in *Aleksandr M. Rodchenko, Varvara F. Stepanova: The Future Is Our Only Goal*, ed. Peter Noever, trans. Mathew Frost, Paul Kremmel, and Michael Robinson (Munich, New York: Prestel, 1991), p. 132.
8. The term "typophoto" is Moholy-Nagy's. For a discussion of the introduction of this and other terminology in this period, see Adrian Sudhalter, "The Self-Reflectivity of Photomontage: Writing on and Exhibiting the Medium, 1920–1931," in *Photomontage between the Wars, 1918–1939*, pp. 13–14.
9. For a discussion of the appellation "photomonteur" and an approach to photomontage in this period, see Brigid Doherty, "'We Are All Neurasthenics!' or The Trauma of Dada Montage," *Critical Inquiry* 24, no. 1 (Autumn 1997): 82–132.
10. Elkin's photomontage is closely related to a c. 1928 poster for the magazine *Poligrafischeskoe proizvodstvo* (Polygraphic production), edited by Solomon Telingater in the 1920s. See reproduction in Elena Barkhatova, *Russian Constructivist Posters* (Moscow and Paris: Flammarion, 1992), no. 54. See also Benjamin's "The Author as Producer," and Gough, *The Artist as Producer*.
11. Nikolai Tarabukin, "Ot mol'berta k mashine" (Moscow: Rabotnik prosveshcheniia, 1923); as "From Easel to Machine," trans. Christina Lodder, in *Modern Art and Modernism: An Anthology of Critical Texts*, ed. Francis Frascina and Charles Harrison (London: Harper and Row, 1983), pp. 135–42.
12. The essential source on this collaboration is Christina Kiaer, *Imagine No Possessions: The Socialist Objects of Russian Constructivism* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005).
13. See Ute Bruning, ed., *Das A und O des Bauhauses: Bauhauwerbung: Schriftbilder, Drucksachen, Ausstellungsdesign* (Leipzig: Edition Leipzig, for the Bauhaus-Archiv, 1995); and Barry Bergdoll and Leah Dickerman, *Bauhaus, 1919–1933: Workshops for Modernity* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2009).
14. In his autobiography, Feist writes: "The poster actually graced the outdoors of my hometown for quite a few years, ironically displaying my total image deep into the period when people of my blood were not allowed into the public swimming pools." See Werner David Feist, *My Years at the Bauhaus*, ed. Sibylle Hoiman; trans. Elizabeth Volk (German/English) and Sibylle Luig (English/German) (Berlin: Bauhaus-Archiv, 2012), p. 76. My thanks to Juliet Kinchin for sharing this story.
15. Varvara Stepanova, "On Constructivism" (fragmentary notes for a paper to be given at INKhUK on December 22, 1921), in *Art into Life: Russian Constructivism, 1914–1932*; trans. James West (Seattle and New York: The Henry Art Gallery, University of Washington and Rizzoli, 1991), p. 74. Klucis (Klutsis), "Photomontage as a New Kind of Agitation Art," p. 117. Vladimir Mayakovsky, in "Revoliutsiia: poetokhronika" (April 17, 1917), in *Izbrannye sochineniia*, vol. 1 (Moscow: Khudozhestevnnaia literatura, 1981), pp. 95–101. Quoted in Richard Stites, *Revolutionary Dreams: Utopian Vision and Experimental Life in the Russian Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 38.

ADRIAN SUDHALTER

> No more painters, no more writers, no more musicians, no more sculptors,
> no more religions, no more republicans, no more royalists, no more imperialists,
> no more anarchists, no more socialists, no more Bolsheviks, no more politicians,
> no more proletarians, no more democrats, no more bourgeois, no more aristocrats,
> no more armies, no more police, no more nations, no more of these idiocies,
> no more, no more, no more, nothing, nothing, nothing.
> —Louis Aragon, 1920

Among the many extreme pronouncements made by members of the avant-garde in the 1920s, these lines written by Louis Aragon stand apart. The poet targets not the objects of artistic endeavor—the artworks, texts, musical compositions—but their makers. Avant-garde discourse is full of proclamations about the end of painting, but the negation of the artist or maker is much rarer.[1] Even Aragon's fellow Dadaist Tristan Tzara spoke of the "new artist," rather than of *no* artist at all.[2] In its rapid-fire assault, Aragon's list is a verbal firing squad that plows down everyone in sight. As a Dada provocation, it begs for contradiction, for outrage, but it also offers a ground zero, a new start.

If such explicit announcements of the abolition of the artist were infrequent, the conditions that prompted them were at the forefront of discussions. After a war that had impacted most corners of the world, and revolutions that had swept Russia and sputtered in nearby countries, and economies that had been decimated, and provisional new governments that had been installed, old systems of patronage were either suspended or abolished. Artists across Western and Central Europe and the fledgling Soviet Russia were forced to take a cold, hard look at whether and how they were to survive, and under what terms and toward what ends. Were they to carry on as before, or did the new social and technological circumstances in which they found themselves require rethinking their roles as individuals in society?

Addressing the context of Soviet Russia in particular, art historian Hubertus Gassner identifies an "existential crisis" among artists of the interwar period: "The avant-garde's utopianism began not with an enthusiastic vision of the future," he notes, "but with a rather skeptical question: How can one be an artist in the Soviet Union of the 1920s?" And further, acknowledging the necessity for these artists of reaching a mass audience and of making use of new technologies, Gassner asks, how was one to "be an artist within a media culture?"[3] For contemporary scholars, including Leah Dickerman and Maria Gough, the interrelated questions of "how to redefine the artist's role as a social agent" and how "the role of the artist might be defined in relation to new media" drove avant-garde production not only in Russia, but across Europe.[4] "The Constructivists' self-critical enterprise," writes Gough, "is but one demonstration—although an extraordinarily innovative and compelling one—of a broad theorization of the question of the artist or intellectual's *Existenzrecht*, or right to exist, conducted in the 1920s and 1930s as much under capital, or capital under crisis, or under fascism, or under the threat of fascism, as it is under communism."[5]

Fig. 1
MIKHAIL KAUFMAN
Aleksandr Rodchenko, likely pictured in 1924
Gelatin silver print, printed c. 1978 from original negative (fig. 2)
15¾ × 11¹³⁄₁₆" (40 × 30 cm)
A. Rodchenko and V. Stepanova Archive, Moscow

Instances of artists throughout Europe and Russia—the loci of the current collection—actively grappling with this existential crisis in the years following World War I are many. Questionnaires—a communicative form that eradicated barriers between writer and reader and encouraged collective debate—provided one means of assessing the state of this "crisis." The editors of the Parisian journal *Littérature* (Aragon among them), for example, asked representatives of the newest literary tendencies to answer the fundamental question "Why do you write?"[6] In Berlin, the Arbeitsrat für Kunst, or worker's council for art, based on Soviet models, published responses to a questionnaire in which members were asked to clarify the role of the artist in the socialist state.[7] Another far-left coalition of Berlin-based artists declared that younger artists were seeking more than "an apparently revolutionary aesthetic, [they seek] the justification of the artist's existence as the instrument of the people's latent desires for a new, untainted way of life."[8] The artist Vladimir L. Khrakovskii summed up the stakes some months later, in a debate concerning Constructivism at VKhUTEMAS (Higher State Artistic and Technical Workshops) in Moscow, declaring that the "problem of construction and form is completely unimportant; what's important is precisely how today's artist justifies his existence. This is a tragic problem."[9]

This existential question found its most vibrant, optimistic, and even generative response among artists who, rather than surrendering on Aragon's battleground, fought back, reinvigorated for this new age. "Our time is an epoch of dying at the same time as revival," wrote the Berlin Dadaist Raoul Hausmann in May 1921. "The new man who emerges needs a new language soiled by no past."[10] Almost immediately following the Russian Revolution of 1917, artists found new words to describe themselves: "artist-proletarian," "constructor," "engineer," a "wholly new type of artist, a socialist worker."[11] This new nomenclature signaled a rejection of the "bourgeois artist," who served himself and the interests of the elite, in favor of the artist-worker, who served the interests of the new society. This lexicon reflected a shift from the "I" to the "we," from the individual to the collective. As Hausmann put it, the "new language" was to be "the language of the masses, not the individual; it is the commitment to a new community."[12]

In Russia—where events, activities, and aspirations served as primary engines of change in this moment, and which is thus the focus of this discussion—the new lexicon did more than merely offer linguistic substitutes. The goal was a fundamental structural overhaul: a radical undermining of the primacy of artistic agency altogether, shifting the emphasis from the individual to his or her greater task or purpose. Or, to put it another way—and in keeping with Dada's negation of the traditional role of the artist as a holdover from a despised system of privilege—to eradicate the *subject* (the artist) in favor of the *thing* (his or her production). The artist per se was a means to an end.

How is it possible, then, that this period of intense scrutiny concerning the artist's role in society and mistrust of individualistic subjecthood produced two of the twentieth century's most compelling images of the artist reimagined? Two photographs, portraits of the Russian artists Aleksandr Rodchenko and El Lissitzky (figs. 1 and 6)—the former created under Communism, the latter under a capitalist regime—are both today considered emblems of the artist as "constructor." A close look at these two well-known images reveals a basic paradox artists faced in this moment: the advancement of artistic subjectivity in a context that foregrounded what is made over the maker, the collective over the individual. Their very making engaged debates about what it meant to be an artist. Such representations of the singular artist ran the risk of perpetuating vestiges of exceptionalism that were at odds with the collective goals of the new Communist society. The acceptance of these two images in the West—the Lissitzky in its own time and the Rodchenko belatedly[13]—as unproblematic illustrations of the "new artist" in Soviet Russia (or as stable equivalents of such nomenclature) fails to recognize their highly contested status in their own day, evidenced by the fact that both photographs remained virtually unpublished in Soviet Russia in the 1920s and '30s. By delving into the specifics of their circumstances—when and why they were made, in what context they were shared, and where, when, and how they were received—we may regain access to the unresolved, provisional status of these images as tests, experiments, probing gambits at the time of their making. It is worth noting that, while the iconic status of these two images recommends them as test cases for deep examination, other photographic portraits, or forms of individual and collective self-representation, might equally serve as entry points into the debates and broader issues considered here.[14]

THE ICON UNDER COMMUNISM

Isolated against a white sheet of fabric or paper, Rodchenko, dressed in *prozodezhda* (production clothing) of his own design and heavy, steel-tipped work boots, is perfectly centered in the composition (fig. 1). Positioned between works of his own making—a black-on-black painting of 1918 on the left and the geometric components of three of his hanging Spatial Constructions (Prostranstvennye konstruktskii) of 1920–21, collapsed for storage, on the right—he stands confidently, one hand on his hip, the other holding a pipe, in a classical contrapposto, staring intently beyond the frame.[15] Everything about this image is staged for the camera, from the framing to the costume, pose, setting, and works on view, resulting in a succinct and highly legible image of the artist reimagined as worker, maker, and thinker, whose materials and vocabulary of forms—the triangle, circle, and square—are those of the builder.

Fig. 2
Box, glass negative, 4 × 6" (10 × 15 cm), and wrapper with Varvara Stepanova's (undated) inscription: "A. M. Rodchenko/with a pipe/standing upright/photographed by M. Kaufman"
A. Rodchenko and V. Stepanova Archive, Moscow

For such a famous image, it is surprising how little is known about when it was taken and why. The photograph does not seem to have been published in its own time and no vintage prints of it are known.[16] Prior to its circulation in the secondary scholarship beginning in the 1970s, it existed only as a glass negative in the Rodchenko archive (fig. 2).[17] At some point, Rodchenko's partner, the artist Varvara Stepanova, noted on the negative's wrapper that the photograph was taken by the photographer and cinematographer Mikhail Kaufman, whom Rodchenko met in late 1922 (he met Kaufman's brother, the filmmaker Dziga Vertov, at the same time). This information, together with the setting (Rodchenko and Stepanova moved into their combined studio and apartment at 4 Miasnitskaia Street in Moscow, where this image was shot, in February 1922) and the articles that are visible in the photograph (the artworks, none dated later than 1921, and the *prozodezhda*, executed by Stepanova), have prompted scholars to propose that the photograph was taken in 1922.[18] A brief consideration of what it would have meant to produce this image in 1922, and then an argument for what I believe is the more likely date of 1924, provides a glimpse of the centrality of issues of subjecthood and its representation in this period, and the rapidly shifting positions toward it over the course of a few historically momentous years.

If Kaufman's portrait of Rodchenko was indeed made in late 1922, it would have coincided with the planning of the journal *Lef*, of which seven issues were produced between 1923 and 1925 by the Left Front of the Arts (Levyi front iskusstv), a group of avant-garde artists, writers, and theorists who advocated for aligning the work of the avant-garde with the ideals of the new Soviet state. Rodchenko was the journal's graphic designer and a regular contributor. A collectively written statement in the pages of its inaugural issue of March 1923 set the conceptual, investigatory tone and isolated the most urgent topic: "The question about our existence is being decided."[19] Each issue of *Lef* set out to present and argue for the group's position through articles and illustrations, organized into three section headings: "Program," "Practice," and "Theory." In the context of *Lef*, where examples of "Practice" printed in its pages were not to be understood as "absolute artistic revelations," but rather as "works in progress,"[20] was it possible that Kaufman's manifestolike photo-

Fig. 3
ALEKSANDR RODCHENKO
Subscription advertisement for *Novyi Lef* (New Lef), page torn from an unidentified brochure (possibly for the State Publishing House, Gosizdat), c. 1926–27
Pictured clockwise, from top left: Sergei Tretiakov, Osip Brik, Vladimir Mayakovsky, Aleksandr Rodchenko, Nikolai Aseev, Viktor Shklovsky, Anton Lavinsky, Sergei Eisenstein, Viktor Pertsov, Boris Pasternak, Vitalii Zhemchuzhnyi, P. Neznamov, Semyon Kirsanov, Dziga Vertov, Varvara Stepanova, and Boris Kushner
Letterpress
10 × 6 13/16" (25.5 × 17.3 cm)
A. Rodchenko and V. Stepanova Archive, Moscow

Fig. 4
MIKHAIL KAUFMAN
Aleksandr Rodchenko, c. 1924
Vintage gelatin silver print
9 1/8 × 6 13/16" (23.2 × 17.3 cm)
A. Rodchenko and V. Stepanova Archive, Moscow

Fig. 5.
ALEKSANDR RODCHENKO
Cover of *Novyi Lef: Zhurnal levogo fronta iskusstv*
(New Lef: Journal of the left front of the arts), no. 1, January 1927
Journal with letterpress cover and illustrations
9 1/16 × 6" (23 × 15.2 cm)
The Museum of Modern Art, New York.
Gift of The Judith Rothschild Foundation

graph of Rodchenko—pictured (as Gough describes it) "before his spatial experiments for the future"[21]—might have been staged for a prospectus describing the goals of the new journal? Or slated for reproduction on its pages or cover?

The journal's visual form was carefully calibrated to match its ideological content. Aside from Rodchenko's Dada-inspired photomontages on its second and third covers, and a small selection of plates within, *Lef* was in visual terms an austere, chiefly typographic affair. Only once, in the penultimate issue, dedicated in memoriam to Liubov Popova, was a photographic portrait of an artist reproduced in its pages.[22] Structurally, within its "Program," "Practice," and "Theory" sections, *Lef* afforded no space for considerations of the first-person author, the "I." It was as though the camera lens, or editorial eye, had been programmatically turned outward, away from the maker or artist. Only the products or prototypes of the artist's work appeared in the plates. Promoting the individual artist was a path expressly *not* taken to advance the avant-garde cause. The work itself, or nothing, would justify the artist's existence. To answer the questions posited above, I suggest that, given the program and layouts of *Lef* in those early years, it is in fact nearly impossible to imagine a place for Kaufman's portrait of Rodchenko in its pages.[23]

Lef ceased publication after the appearance of its seventh issue, in January 1925, only to return in January 1927 as the reconceived *Novyi Lef* (New Lef; fig. 5). This new journal, in contrast to its predominantly typographic predecessor, was explicitly oriented toward "factography"—a neologism (based on "photography") used to describe language and literature depicting the factual realities of everyday life in the Soviet Union.[24] In a remarkable reversal, considering the visual and structural downplaying of the author in the earlier journal, Rodchenko's subscription advertisement for *Novyi Lef* placed the contributors up front, in a kind of collective group portrait (fig. 3). Sixteen individual headshots, each figure identified by name, surround what appears to be a preliminary design for the cover of the inaugural issue of *Novyi Lef*, along with the words "read" and "subscribe." At top center is an image of Vladimir Mayakovsky, the journal's general editor, who is flanked by the theorist Osip Brik (at left) and Rodchenko (at right). The image of Mayakovsky derived from what has been identified as Rodchenko's first serious photographic shoot of April 1924.[25] The portrait of Brik, in which the left lens of his glasses is filled with *Lef*'s logo, is likely also from 1924.[26] The profile shot of Rodchenko (fig. 4) appears to be an outtake from Kaufman's shoot that has often been dated 1922—although, considering its company, it seems more likely that this portrait, too, may date from 1924.[27]

The arrangement at the center of the *Novyi Lef* advertisement is close to that on the cover of the first issue of the journal (see fig. 5); here, however, the portrait of Mayakovsky seen at the top is repeated within the central design, at left. This might indicate that, as originally conceived, Rodchenko imagined a design scheme in which the space occupied by Mayakovsky on the journal's preliminary cover was to have been filled, in subsequent issues, by other members of the group: by Brik with his *Lef* logo, by Rodchenko in the *prozodezhda*, and so forth. If such a cover scheme was under consideration, it was never used. While these artists' contributions appeared frequently in the pages of *Novyi Lef*, their likenesses were not reproduced on the covers as executed. The third issue of *Novyi Lef* in 1927, rather, pictured the dismantling of a large figurative monument—a testament to the journal's position on idolatry—despite its turn to photography. Issue 8–9 of the same year featured a photograph of Lenin on the cover. Commemoration, it seems, was an exception (the issue of *Lef* dedicated to the late Popova was likewise exceptional): apparently, death was the one circumstance that might justify turning the lens toward the individual artist as subject. Debates ensued in the pages of *Novyi Lef* about photography, portraiture, and commemoration in which Rodchenko advocated for multiplicity over the "single, immutable portrait." A "file of snapshots," he contended, "allows no one to idolize or falsify Lenin." He argued against the "single 'synthetic' portrait" in order to ensure that "we will be real people, not actors."[28]

In Kaufman's portrait, Rodchenko is nothing if not an actor playing the part of Constructor. If 1922 and 1923 constituted a moment of iconoclasm and the vehement omission of the individual subject, with the death of Lenin this position was reconsidered. Lenin himself opposed iconography, but his death in January 1924 opened the floodgates to a wave of heroicizing images.[29] If not a wholesale anomaly, Kaufman's iconic image of the Constructor, starring Rodchenko, with its fabricated aesthetic and adulation of the individual, is perhaps best characterized as an experiment, a provocation to test the waters of a return to idolatry, a "work in progress," rather than the "absolute artistic revelation" that it has since become.[30] Under normal circumstances, a matter of two years' difference in dating a work would have little significance, but in the early years of Soviet Russia, the death of Lenin represented a watershed. Up until that point, the representation of the individual had been anathema among Soviet artists intent on *not* duplicating forms associated with religion and bygone

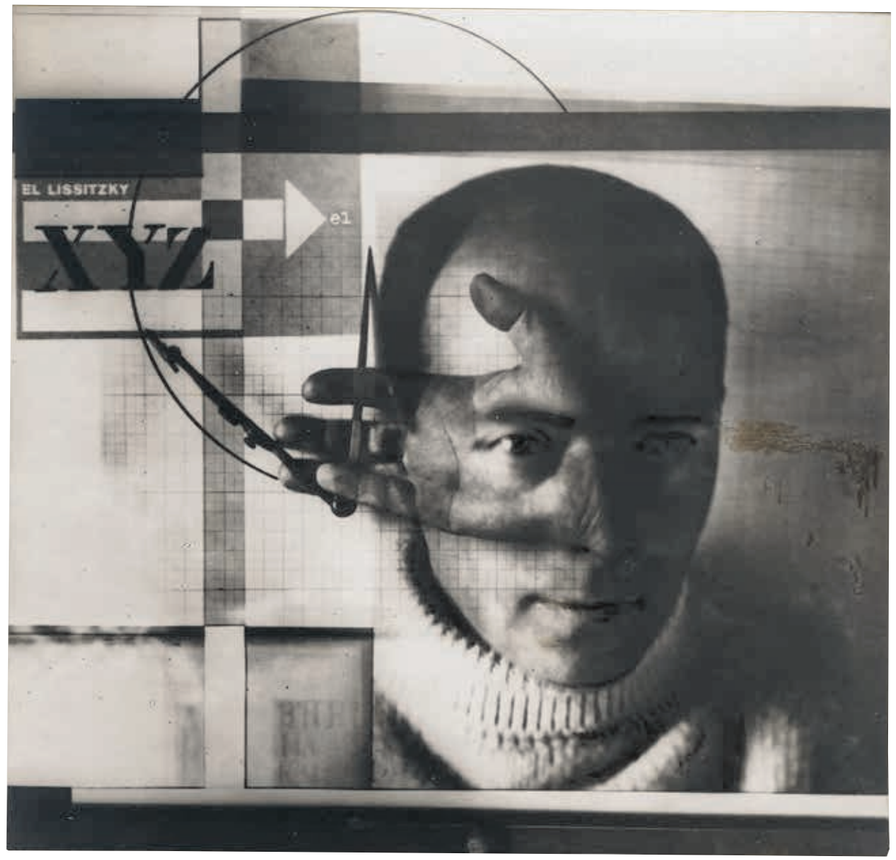


Fig. 6
EL LISSITZKY
Selbstlichtportrait (Self-light portrait), 1924
Gelatin silver print with ink (touchups likely by Dreier), 1926
4⅞ × 7" (12.4 × 18 cm)
Katherine S. Dreier Papers/Société Anonyme Archive.
Yale Collection of American Literature,
Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library

Fig. 7
El Lissitzky, Atelier Lichtbilder Lissitzky (Lissitzky photo studio), back cover of the journal *ABC*, no. 3–4 (detail), 1925
British Library Board, General Reference Collection C.131.k.4.

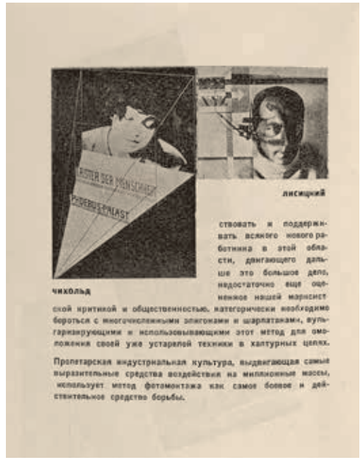


Fig. 8
Left: Jan Tschichold's poster design for Rudolf Meinert's 1927 film *Laster der Menschheit* (*The Vice of Humanity*); right: Lissitzky's self-portrait, reproduced in Gustav Klutsis's "Fotomontazh kak novyi vid agitatsionnogo iskusstva" ("Photomontage as a New Kind of Agitation Art"), in *Izofront: Klassovaia bor'ba na fronte prostranstvennykh iskusstv* (Art-front: Class struggle at the battlefront of the spatial arts; Anthology of essays by the October Group), ed. Pavel Novitskii (Moscow: OGIZ-IZOGIZ, 1931)
The Museum of Modern Art Library, New York

power structures, but with Lenin's death, the representation of the individual—artist, intellectual, political leader—took on a new significance and urgency in the face of the far greater crisis of leadership, momentum, and of the Soviet experiment itself.

THE CONSTRUCTOR UNDER CAPITALISM

In El Lissitzky's multilayered photomontage, the artist's face is pictured in close-up, looking directly at the viewer (fig. 6). His hand, bearing a compass, is superimposed over his face. An arrangement of geometric forms within a perfect circle at upper left coalesce to form his personal logo and, echoing the form of his head, seem to map his mind.[31] By literally turning the camera on himself to create an image of the artist reenvisioned as a thinker, designer, and builder of the new society, Lissitsky offered a visual proposition for how one might represent the individual subject in a new role, in a society based on collectivity.[32] His proposition was met with starkly different receptions in Western Europe and in Soviet Russia.

When Lissitzky created this image, in December 1924, he was living and working in Switzerland, at a physical and ideological distance from the debates roiling Moscow. Lissitzky was an active member of the Soviet avant-garde, who sought a role for his work within the new society, but he was not a member of the First Working Group of Constructivists (Pervaia rabochaia gruppa konstruktivistov), founded by Rodchenko and others in Moscow in early 1921; indeed, his views differed sharply from theirs, particularly on matters of Productivism—the recasting of the artist as a designer of new forms with utilitarian function for society at large. In December 1921 Lissitzky had left Russia to live and work in Berlin, where he actively forged cultural ties between Soviet Russia and Western Europe, likely on behalf of the Bolshevik government (by 1924 he had moved to Switzerland for medical reasons).[33] He was remarkably successful in this endeavor through his exhibition and publication efforts, and with the personal relationships he established. If his work in Western Europe seems out of sync with that of his Soviet comrades, it was not, it seems, for lack of awareness of the issues at stake, but likely had more to do with his diplomatic mission as mediator, communicator, and propagandist between two worlds. If the allure of the individual, the subject, the "I," was an effective force in the West, what better way to capture an audience than to appeal to its desires? To use the language of capitalism to convey a message of collective socialism?

Within days of completing this *Selbstlichtportrait* (self-light portrait), as he referred to it at the time, Lissitzky hand-delivered a print (presumably) of it to his friend the Dutch architect Mart Stam, then living in Thun, Switzerland.[34] Shortly thereafter, the portrait was reproduced

on the back cover of Stam's journal *ABC: Beiträge zum Bauen* (Contributions on building; fig. 7). Here, the image appeared slightly cropped at left as part of a graphic arrangement announcing Lissitzky's photography studio, the Atelier Lichtbilder Lissitzky. The enlarged, perfectly aligned *A*, *B*, and *Z* (Atelier LichtBilder LissitZky) of the headline playfully riffs on the journal's title, and the framing of the arrangement, a thick vertical border turning ninety degrees at top to form a right-pointing arrow, echoes Lissitzky's personal logo within the image, which he had recently printed as letterhead.[35] Below the photograph is a text declaring: "EVERY artist who subscribes to *ABC* has the right to publish his photograph free of charge. (With the guarantee of becoming instantly famous.) EVERY woman who subscribes to *ABC* has the right to publish her photograph. (Without guarantee.) EVERYONE subscribe to *ABC*."[36] Flickering between actual promotion (of the journal *ABC*) and what was clearly parody (the guarantee of instant fame), the mode of address is both humorous and destabilizing. What was one to make of the Atelier Lichtbilder Lissitzky? Was it an actual endeavor? A newly established business where Lissitzky might offer the service of creating photographic portraits of artists in the manner of his own self-portrait?

Lissitzky was, at the time, actively working as an advertiser for clients and was thus intimately involved in the creation of capitalist commodity-desire. It was in this context, in fact, that he had begun to experiment with photogram and photomontage techniques. At the lower left corner of his self-portrait as reproduced in *ABC* only (and nowhere else to follow) is the typed indication of a patent: "Pat. Brit./D.R.P/169434." An actual English patent with this number exists, but it bears no relation to photography or to Lissitzky's work.[37] The inclusion of this official imprimatur was likely not a specific reference, but a parodic gesture within this parodic advertisement: a mock "patent" for Lissitky's newly perfected, multilayered photographic technique. In his *Selbstlichtportrait*, the artist offers a seductive, visually intriguing representation of the newly reinvented artist, with his tools (graph paper, compass, universal geometric vocabulary) and the means of the image's making (the layered, constructive process) on display. It could be argued that it is this literal and conceptual transparency of means that, in seriousness or in jest, Lissitzky purported to patent. The *Selbstlichtportrait* shifts the conversation from one about appropriate imagery—the singular versus the plural subject; the exceptional individual versus the anonymous maker—to the *means* of production, as witnessed in the form of the work itself.

The manner in which Lissitzky first presented his *Selbstlichtportrait* to the world, in the pages of *ABC*—the only time, in fact, that he controlled the context in which it appeared—placed it explicitly within the discourse of advertising. Parodic or not, it functioned as an advertisement for himself and for his newfound technique. Having discovered a new multilayered mode that could intercept the limitations of straight photography—its claims to truth; its illusionary potential—Lissitzky "patented" and advertised it, creating an all-in-one calling card poised to guarantee him instant fame. And the campaign was, indeed, effective. After its reproduction in *ABC*, Lissitzky's *Selbstlichtportrait* was reproduced extensively in the United States and in Germany, where it was given the title *The Constructor* (*Der Konstrukteur*) in 1928.[38]

The *Selbstlichtportrait* fared less well in Soviet Russia. While it would seem to have exemplified Lissitzky's arguments for the potential of manipulated photography to expand the parameters of straight photography (particularly as concerned the limits of photographic portraiture) published in *Sovetskoe foto* (Soviet photography) in 1928, it was not chosen to illustrate the article.[39] The image was reproduced only once in Russia in this period, in Gustav Klutsis's "Fotomontazh kak novyi vid agitatsionnogo iskusstva" ("Photomontage as a New Kind of Agitation Art") of 1931. In his text, Klutsis characterized Lissitzky as one of a number of Russian artists who used photomontage, but whose work "often slipped into the advertising/formalist type of poster art which had no influence on the development of photomontage [in Russia]."[40] Lissitzky's image appeared as the last of fifteen illustrations, on a page alongside the German artist Jan Tschichold's design for a film poster (fig. 8). Klutsis's positioning of Lissitzky's self-portrait in the realm of advertising was neither misplaced nor unfounded; it only failed to recognize the work as a carefully calculated, critical response to these conditions.

■

The individual artist as traditionally defined was, as Aragon so emphatically phrased it, "no more, no more, no more." The eradication of that artist signaled the overthrow of bourgeois individualism and a system of outmoded elitism and privilege that were to go the way of the Russian tsars and the German kaisers. The new, reimagined artist could not be promoted with anachronistic tropes. While the images of Rodchenko and Lissitzky discussed here were intended by their makers to represent the artist reimagined, both likenesses are

Fig. 9
Photograph of Mikhail Kaufman, reproduced in *Novyi Lef* (New Lef), no. 8–9, 1927. The caption credits Kaufman as the cinematographer on Dziga Vertov's 1928 film *Odinnadtsatyi* (*The Eleventh Year*)
The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of The Judith Rothschild Foundation

precariously balanced between the individuality and charisma of the subject and the representation of his new role in relation to society at large.

In *Novyi Lef*'s issue 8–9 there is a photograph of Mikhail Kaufman with his camera (fig. 9). This photograph, too, presents the artist in a new role. But here, with his face half-obscured, Kaufman could be anyone: it is his activity, rather than his personal identity, that defines him. In the interwar period, in order to be truly new, transformed, and free of vestiges of the past, the artist was not to be defined by individual attributes or personal charisma, but by his or her mode of engagement with new technologies, new audiences, new activities, new purposes, and new creative platforms—whether signage for schools or private firms; promotional projects for commodities, municipalities, movies; propaganda for governments or political parties; or theoretical engagement with all this across a thriving international network of avant-garde channels.[41]

Note: This essay's epigraph is from Louis Aragon's "Manifeste du movement Dada," *Littérature*, no. 13 (May 1920): 2; trans. in *The Dada Reader: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Dawn Ades (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), p. 181. I am grateful to Jodi Hauptman, Maria Gough, and Diana Stoll for their critical engagement with this essay and to Jane Cavalier and Barbora Bartunkova for their research assistance.

1. On the death of painting, see Yve-Alain Bois's classic essay "Painting: The Task of Mourning," in his *Painting as Model* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990), pp. 230–44.
2. Tristan Tzara, "Manifeste Dada 1918," *Dada*, no. 3 (March 23, 1918): 1; trans. in Ades, ed., *The Dada Reader*, p. 38.
3. Hubertus Gassner, "The Constructivists: Modernism on the Way to Modernization," in *The Great Utopia: The Russian and Soviet Avant-Garde, 1915–1932* (New York: Guggenheim Museum, 1992), pp. 307, 298.
4. Leah Dickerman, "The Propagandizing of Things," in *Aleksandr Rodchenko*, ed. Magdalena Dabrowski, Dickerman, and Peter Galassi (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1998), p. 63. Dickerman and Barry Bergdoll pose similar questions in the Curators' Preface to *Bauhaus 1919–1933: Workshops for Modernity*, ed. Bergdoll and Dickerman (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2009), p. 13.
5. Maria Gough, *The Artist as Producer: Russian Constructivism in Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), p. 18.
6. "Pourquoi écrivez-vous?," *Littérature*, no. 9 (November 1919): 2.
7. *Ja! Stimmen des Arbeitsrates für Kunst in Berlin* (Berlin: Verlag der Photographischen Gesellschaft, 1919). The questionnaire is trans. in *German Expressionism: Documents from the End of the Wilhelmine Empire to the Rise of National Socialism*, ed. Rose-Carol Washton Long (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), pp. 207–8.
8. Otto Dix, Max Dungert, et. al. "Offener Brief an die Novembergruppe," *Der Gegner* 2, no. 8–9 (June 1921): 297–301; trans. in *Art in Theory, 1900–2000: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, ed. Charles Harrison and Paul Wood (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), p. 264.

9. "Transcript of the Discussion of Comrade Stepanova's Paper 'On Constructivism'" (December 22, 1921); trans. in *Art Into Life: Russian Constructivism, 1914–1932* (Seattle: Henry Art Gallery, University of Washington, 1990), p. 75.

10. Raoul Hausmann, "Die neue Kunst" (May 1921), in *Führer durch die Abteilung der Novembergrupp. Kunstausstellung Berlin 1921* (Berlin: Otto Elsner, 1921), p. 10. (Trans. by author.)

11. For a discussion of the metamorphosis of this nomenclature in the early 1920s, see Gassner, "The Constructivists," p. 308. The last phrase is used by Gustav Klutsis in "Fotomontage in der USSR," in *Fotomontage* (Berlin: Staatliche Kunstbibliothek, 1931), n.p. [6]; trans. in *Photomontage between the Wars, 1918–1939: Selections from the Merrill C. Berman Collection* (Madrid and Ottawa: Fundación Juan March; Carlton University Art Gallery, 2012), p. 132. With the exception of articles of 1918 by Osip Brik and Aleksandr Rodchenko on the topic of the "artist-proletarian," sustained discussions of the artist's role (as opposed to his or her production) are not to my knowledge common in the primary texts.

12. Hausmann, "Die neue Kunst," p. 11.

13. The photograph of Rodchenko began to circulate in the secondary scholarship in the West in the 1970s (see n. 17 below), while that of Lissitzky proliferated in Switzerland, the United States, and Germany in the 1920s (see n. 38 below).

14. Employing photographic portraiture as his point of departure, Frederic Schwartz offers a model of such an approach, focusing on the reconceived artist in Germany in the 1920s; see "The Eye of the Expert," in *Blind Spots: Critical Theory and the History of Art in Twentieth Century Germany* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), pp. 86–100. Discussions of artistic identity confronted by mass production and ideals of collectivity are not limited to visual representations. They are taken up, for example, in T'ai Smith's consideration of patents and copyrights in "The Identity of Design as Intellectual Property," in *Bauhaus Construct: Fashioning Identity, Discourse and Modernism*, ed. Jeffrey Saletnik and Robin Schuldenfrei (London: Routledge, 2009), pp. 226–44. The rationale behind identifying artists by name on mass-produced graphic material (such as posters) in Soviet Russia could serve as another point of entry into such questions.

15. The painting on the left is Rodchenko's *Non-Objective Painting no. 80* (*Black on Black*), 1918, now at MoMA, accession no. 156.1986. According to the artist's own numbering, the Spatial Constructions seen are numbers 9, 11, and 13. See *Alexander Rodchenko: Spatial Construction/ Raumkonstruktionen* (Cologne and Ostfildern-Ruit: Galerie Gmurzynska; Hatje Cantz, 2002), pp. 72–73, 77–79, 84–85.

16. According to Rodchenko's grandson, Alexander Lavrentiev, the photographic prints found today in the Rodchenko/Stepanova Archive, the Mul'timedia Art Muzei, Moskva (Moscow), and the Gosudarstvennyi muzei V.V. Maiakovskogo (Moscow) are all modern, made from the original 4×6" (10×15 cm) glass negative that survives in the Rodchenko/Stepanova Archive (see fig. 2). Lavrentiev, email to Jane Cavalier, November 27, 2019. A cropped print belonging to the Costakis Collection of the State Museum of Contemporary Art, Thessaloniki, is printed on photographic paper with the phrase (in English) printed on the back: "This Paper Manufactured by Kodak." This paper was in production in the 1970s and '80s, suggesting a later printing date from the original negative. Lee Ann Daffner, MoMA photographs conservator, email to the author, December 17, 2019.

17. Among the earliest known reproductions of the image are in *Von der Fläche zum Raum: Russland, 1916–24* (Cologne: Galerie Gmurzynska, 1974), p. 17, where it is cropped in the same way as the Costakis print and dated 1929 (corresponding to the English-language inscription on the verso of the Costakis print: "Rodchenko photo by Kauffman [*sic*] 1929"). The full-length portrait is also reproduced in David Elliott, ed., *Alexander Rodchenko* (Oxford: Museum of Modern Art, 1979), p. 41, without a caption. I am grateful to Barbora Bartunkova for her research into the publication history of this image.

18. The photograph has been published with dates ranging from 1921 to 1929, but in recent years 1922 appears most frequently. The dating of the design and execution of the *prozodezhda* has not been established. Two drawings related to it exist—a design by Rodchenko and a caricature of Rodchenko wearing the outfit by Stepanova—but neither is firmly dated, and the symmetrical, stylized format of the former resembles a series of costume designs Rodchenko exhibited in Paris in 1925.

19. LEF, "Whom Does Lef Warn?" (*Lef*, no. 1, March 19, 1923); trans. in *Russian Futurism through Its Manifestoes, 1912–1928*, ed. Anna Lawton (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988), p. 200.

20. V[ladimir] V. Mayakovsky and O[sip] M. Brik, "Our Linguistic Work" (*Lef*, no. 1, March 19, 1923); trans. in Lawton, ed., *Russian Futurism*, p. 203.

21. Maria Gough, "Working Models," ms. p. 8. I am grateful to Gough for sharing the original English text for this article, which was published as "Modelli al lavoro," in *Tempo moderno: Da Van Gogh a Warhol, lavoro, macchine e automazione nelle arti del Novecento*, ed. Germano Celant (Milan: Skira, 2006).

22. *Lef*, no. 2 (1924), n.p. [3].

23. Aleksei Gan, Constructivism's major theorist (see Kristin Romberg's essay in the present volume, pp. 90–93), conveyed a similar position on the matter of subjecthood in his major treatise *Konstruktivizm* (Tver, Russia: Tver'skoe izdatel'stvo, 1922). This volume has been translated and with an introduction by Christina Lodder as Aleksei Gan, *Constructivism* (Barcelona: Tenov, 2013). At stake for Gan was the negation of subjecthood through all available means: universalized visual form; the principles of constructive production; and the linguistic suppression of the subject. Gan tended to align the grammatical subject of his sentences with the "bourgeois priests of art." The term "Constructivism" appears throughout Gan's text, but only occasionally, in the last pages of the book, does the term "Constructivist" appear.

24. See Leah Dickerman's important discussion of this shift in "The Fact and the Photograph," *October*, no. 118 (Fall 2006): 132–52.

25. Dabrowski, Dickerman, Galassi, eds., *Aleksandr Rodchenko*, pp. 207–14 (plates 133–46), 305.

26. The original gelatin silver print image with gouache today belongs to the Muzey izobrazitel'nykh iskusstv imeni A.S. Pushkina and has long been identified as an unused maquette for the cover of *Lef* and dated 1924. The angular typography of the journal's distinctive logo—word ЛЕФ (Lef), horizontally bisected in two tones—is recognizable as that of the old *Lef* (as opposed to *Novyi Lef*'s rounded letters), supporting this dating, but the basis of its intended usage is unclear.

27. Three related photographs in the archive are thought to date from 1924: a more casual image of Rodchenko, also in the *prozodezhda* with the pipe against the white sheet, clearly from the same shoot; an out-of-focus image of Rodchenko wearing the *prozodezhda* behind his hanging Spatial Construction no. 12; a snapshot taken by Rodchenko of Stepanova at her desk showing the same arrangement of works seen in the background of the main image. It is perhaps in the context of these images that Lavrentiev supposes the main image might date from "1923–1924 (end of 1923–beginning of 1924)." Lavrentiev, email to Cavalier, December 17, 2019.

28. Aleksandr Rodchenko, "Against the Synthetic Portrait, For the Snapshot" (*Lef*, no. 4, 1928); trans. in *Photography in the Modern Era: European Documents and Critical Writings, 1913–1940*, ed. Christopher Phillips (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1989), pp. 241, 240, 242.

29. See Margarita Tupitsyn, "Lenin's Death and the Birth of Political Photomontage," in *The Soviet Photograph, 1924–1937* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), pp. 9–34. For a useful discussion of Marxism and iconophobia in the German context, see Andrés Mario Zervigón, "Persuading with the Unseen? *Die Arbeiter-Illustrierte Zeitung*, Photography, and German Communism's Iconophobia," *Visual Resources* 26, no. 2 (June 2010): 147–64.

30. The existence of snapshots by Rodchenko of figures such as Stepanova and Gan engrossed in their work supports the idea that the representation of the Constructor was under active investigation, but, as with Kaufman's image of Rodchenko, the proliferation of these images in the secondary literature has obscured the fact that they, too, remained unpublished in their day.

31. The scholarship on this image is extensive. It is well-synthesized and reassessed by Leah Dickerman in "El Lissitzky's Camera Corpus," in *Situating El Lissitzky: Vitebsk, Berlin, Moscow*, ed. Nancy Perloff and Brian Reed (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2003), pp. 153–76. For a thorough material analysis, see Klaus Pollmeier, "'Der Konstrukteur' von El Lissitzky: Anmerkungen zur Technik," in Margarita Tupiysyn, *El Lissitzky: Jensiits der Abstraktion, Fotographie, Design, Kooperation* (Munich: Schirmer Mosel, 1999), pp. 238–39.

32. In her annotations to the artist's correspondence, Lissitzky's partner Sophie Küppers recalled that in June of 1924, in Ambri-Sotto Switzerland, she brought Lissitzky her father's "old camera [. . .] a monstrosity with wooden plate holders measuring 13 × 18 cm and a large Zeiss lens. Henceforth experiments were carried out, the famous self-portrait was begun, photographs made for Pelikan ink advertisements, and so on." Sophie Lissitzky-Küppers, ed., *El Lissitzky: Life, Letters, Texts* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1968), p. 52. Lissitzky himself, or Küppers, or one of their guests that summer, Jean (Hans) Arp or Sophie Taeuber-Arp, could have been behind the camera.

33. See Christina Lodder's clarifying discussion in "El Lissitzky and the Export of Constructivism," in Perloff and Reed, eds., *Situating El Lissitzky*, pp. 27–46; on his official role in particular, see pp. 33, 36.

34. On December 12, 1924, he wrote to Küppers: "Am now working on a self-light portrait [*Selbstlicht-portrait*]. A great piece of nonsense, if it all goes according to plan." On December 20, he sent her the photograph ("Enclosed is my self-portrait: my monkey-hand"), and on December 29 he announced: "I am going to Thun tomorrow, via Lucerne." Lissitzky's letters to Küppers, today housed in Special Collections and Visual Resources, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles, are partially trans. in Lissitzky-Küppers, ed., *El Lissitzky*, p. 56.

35. According to Peter Nisbet, the December 12, 1924, letter referred to above was the first to use Lissitzky's new letterhead. See Nisbet, "El Lissitzky in the Proun Years: A Study of His Work and Thought, 1919–1927" (PhD diss., Yale University, May 1995), 317n29.

36. Nisbet points out the "casually and mildly sexist" nature of this remark in ibid., p. 334. Future scholars might consider it in relation to representation of female artists included in Lissitzky and Arp's contemporaneous *Die Kunstismen* (Zurich: Eugen Rentsch, 1925).

37. Nisbet, whose thorough study of Lissitzky still anchors the scholarship, tracked down the original patent. Nisbet, "El Lissitzky in the Proun Years," pp. 334–35.

38. The first reproduction of the work after *ABC* was in Katherine S. Dreier, ed., *Modern Art* (New York: Société Anonyme, Museum of Modern Art, 1926), p. 76, where it was published in reverse without a caption, but with an abbreviated statement based an autobiographical text sent by Lissitzky to Dreier, in which the "XYZ" in the image is explained. The photographic print Dreier received from Lissitzky (fig. 6) and the original manuscript "Der Lebensfilm von El bis 1926" are in the Katherine S. Dreier Papers/Société Anonyme Archive, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, New Haven (box 22, folder 634); trans. in Lissitzky-Küppers, ed., *El Lissitzky*, pp. 325–26. Thereafter it was reproduced in Paul Westheim, "Zeitlupe," *Das Kunstblatt*, no. 12 (March 1928): 89 as "El Lissitzky: *Der Konstrukteur*, Photomalerei 1924" (its first publication as "The Constructor"); Traugott Schalcher, "El Lissitzky, Moskau," *Gebrauchsgraphik* 5, no. 12 (December 1928): 49 as "*Selbstportrait* (Photomalerei), 1923 [*sic*]"; on the cover of Franz Roh and Jan Tschichold, *Foto-Auge: 76 Fotos der Zeit* (Stuttgart: F. Wedekind, 1929), captioned "El Lissitzky, *Selbstbildnis*"; and in Jan Tschichold, "Über El Lissitzky," *Imprimatur: Ein Jahrbuch für Bücherfreunde*, vol. 3 (1932), p. 97, as "el lissitzky: *der konstrukteur. selbstbidlnis*. doppelkopie und fotogram. 1924."

39. El Lissitzky, "Fotopis'," *Sovetskoe foto*, no. 10 (May 15, 1929): 311; trans. Peter Nisbet as "Photo Painting," in *El Lissitzky, 1890–1941: Architect, Painter, Photographer, Typographer* (Eindhoven: Municipal Van Abbemuseum, 1990), p. 70. This article was instead illustrated with two still-life photograms.

40. Gustav Klutsis, "Fotomontazh kak novyi vid agitatsionnogo iskusstva," in *Izofront: Klassovaia bor'ba na fronte prostranstvennykh iskusstv; sbornik statei ob"edineniia Oktiabr'*, ed. P. Novitskii (Moscow: OGIZ IZOGIZ, 1931); trans. in *Photomontage between the Wars*, p. 117.

41. In Russia, the case of Mayakovsky was a special, and perhaps cautionary one. The cult of personality that surrounded the poet was carefully managed in the 1920s and exploded upon his death in 1930.

Earth-shattering wars and revolutions have taken place in and around us; whole generations disappeared from our sides from one day to the next; from one day to the next the scales of time-tested aesthetic truths fell from us, helping our most painful and most wanton selves to find expression and the ability to act. . . . Our era is the era of constructivity.

—Lajos Kassák, 1922[1]

1. Ludwig [Lajos] Kassák, preface to Kassák and László Moholy-Nagy, eds., *Buch neuer Künstler* (Vienna: Elbemühl, 1922; Baden: Lars Müller, 1991, with trans. by Eileen Walliser-Schwarzbart).

NEW BOUNDARIES IN EUROPE
AS ESTABLISHED BY THE PEACE CONFERENCE
(detail), 1919

Key

———	New boundaries of Germany
++++++	Proposed new boundaries of other states
???????	New boundaries not yet determined
.....	International boundaries in 1914
A B C	Plebiscite areas in Slesvig
D E	Plebiscite areas in East and West Prussia

This 1919 map represents new national borders in Europe and Russia, following the Russian Revolution, World War I, and the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The artists represented in this publication were impacted by these upheavals. Their works in the plates that follow are ordered according to the locations where they were made, corresponding roughly to their geographic relation to one another, beginning in Russia and moving west through Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Germany, Switzerland, the Netherlands, and Italy. —Editors' note

Map published by American Geographical Society of New York for Committee on Public Information
Ink on drafting vellum
13 × 15" (33 × 39 cm)
American Geographical Society Library, University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee Libraries

Attributed to WLADYSLAW STRZEMIŃSKI
UNOVIS POSTERS
1920–21

MASHA CHLENOVA

On June 8, 1920, El Lissitzky addressed a conference of art teachers and students in Moscow on behalf of the artists' collective UNOVIS (Affirmers of the New Art), which he characterized as "the new movement, the avant-garde of the creative Red Army."[1] In late spring of that year, as the Russian civil war took its last decisive turn in the fight against the newly formed republic of Poland, the Bolshevik (Red Army) victory on Russia's western front was seen as indispensable for securing the territory and ideological goals of the Russian Revolution.[2] The artists who had founded UNOVIS in January 1920 in Vitebsk saw their "artistic front" as inseparable from the military one. Their principal weapon was the radically new visual idiom of Suprematism, a form of geometric abstraction invented by their charismatic teacher, Kazimir Malevich. Seeking to transform the visual fabric of everyday life, UNOVIS artists adorned building façades, theater interiors, and trams, and produced billboards and street signs. Those artists who had joined the ranks of the Red Army served its cause directly by working for the Russian telegraph agency ROSTA, producing agitational posters, newsletters, and other graphic materials. Civilian artists helped the Bolshevik front by fulfilling government commissions, including those of ROSTA and of Litizdat Polituprayleniia Zapfronta (Literary Publishing House of the Political Administration of the Western Front).

The three posters under consideration here (plates 5–7) were printed in the city of Smolensk, where the headquarters of the western front were located for most of 1920.[3] Although the posters are not signed by an individual artist, they have often been attributed to Wladyslaw Strzemiński, who had been a student of Malevich at the GSKhM or SVOMAS (State Free Art Workshops) in Moscow in 1918–19. Strzemiński became involved in the revolutionary artistic life upon joining IZO Narkompros (Fine Arts Department of the People's Commissariat of Enlightenment) in October 1918. A year later he moved to Smolensk, where he taught art and ran the arts studio of the GUBONO (District Department of People's Education) with his partner, the sculptor Katarzyna Kobro, with whom he established a branch of UNOVIS in April 1920, maintaining close ties with Malevich and teaching the principles of Cubism and Suprematism to their students. On April 4, 1920, Strzemiński became the head of the arts studio, which occasionally received commissions for agitational posters and signboards from ROSTA and other Bolshevik government organizations. While he was undoubtedly the leading figure in the creation of these posters, it is problematic to credit Strzemiński as their sole author. They were most likely made at the arts studio according to the collective creative principles of UNOVIS, probably with the active involvement of Kobro and possibly some of their students as well.[4]

Strzemiński's first commission to design agitational works for city streets came in February 1919, when Narkompros sent him to his

Attributed to WLADYSLAW STRZEMIŃSKI
5 *Organization of Production Is Victory over the Capitalist Order*, c. 1920–21
Poster for SmolROSTA (Smolensk office of Russian Telegraph Agency)
Lithograph
9⅜ × 18⅛" (24.3 × 46 cm)

Attributed to WLADYSLAW STRZEMIŃSKI
6 *Organize a "Week of the Red Gift" Anywhere and Everywhere*, 1920
Poster for SmolROSTA (Smolensk office of Russian Telegraph Agency)
Lithograph
11⅛ × 23⅛" (28.4 × 58.7 cm)

Attributed to WLADYSLAW STRZEMIŃSKI
7 *The Red Army Is Heroically Fighting at the Front*, 1920
Poster for SmolROSTA (Smolensk office of Russian Telegraph Agency)
Lithograph
28⅝ × 17¹¹⁄₁₆" (72.7 × 44.9 cm)

Fig. 1
Suprematist billboard above the door to the ROSTA telegraph office in Vitebsk or Smolensk, c. 1920

native city of Minsk in conjunction with the so-called Day of the Red Gift (Den' krasnogo podarka), commemorating the first anniversary of the Red Army.[5] Together with the local head of IZO, Vsevolod Dmitriev, and the sculptor Stefan Tsekhanovskii, Strzemiński adorned walls of buildings and public spaces with large billboards apparently comprising geometric abstract elements.[6] Reporting to Moscow about his trip, Strzemiński claimed to have developed "a matter-of-fact general style . . . simple planes and technical constructions; without any aesthetic and superfluousness" and to have established it "through the interaction with workers."[7] With a goal of training local artists to continue such work, Strzemiński urged Narkompros to set up workshops for housepainters that would "enable them to make signboards, decorations, etc."[8]

The transformation of urban environments required a visual language that was simple and versatile, yet powerful and new. In the eyes of UNOVIS members, Suprematist geometric elements offered all this. In January 1920 UNOVIS was tasked with transforming the streets of Vitebsk for the "Week of the Front" (Nedelia fronta), another fundraising drive for the Red Army. They made signboards with revolutionary slogans; the format of these would serve as a kind of template for Suprematist graphics, where geometric elements were configured into a versatile composition that could be transposed from paper to plywood to canvas at varying scales—as seen, for example, in a 1920 photograph showing a signboard hung above the entrance to a ROSTA workshop, in either Vitebsk or Smolensk (fig. 1).[9] That composition consists of Suprematist elements: a circle on the right and a group of rectangular forms on the left, while the center is open. The words (in Russian) "[Artistic workshop] ROSTA"[10] appear on a plaque attached below, but one can imagine them being integrated into the composition or simply printed on the open white space in its middle. The poster *Organize a "Week of the Red Gift" Anywhere and Everywhere* (*Ustroite "Nedeliu krasnogo podarka" vezde i vsiudu*; plate 6) has a related composition: clusters of abstract geometric shapes at left and right allow space in between, here occupied by text.

In October 1920 Lissitzky, Malevich, and several other members of the UNOVIS collective came to Smolensk to attend a conference, which brought together members of the UNOVIS Tvorkomy (Creative Committees) from Vitebsk and Smolensk and representatives of the military Zapfront (western front).[11] In the same month, a Smolensk newspaper reported that the committee concerned with the celebration of the October Revolution's third anniversary had entrusted Strzemiński with designing signboards on seven specific subjects.[12] One of the topics was "Proletarians of the whole world unite," which may have been the impetus behind the poster *Organization of Production Is Victory over the Capitalist Order* (*Organizatsiia proizvodstva pobeda nad kapitalisticheskim stroem*, 1920–21; plate 5), another work in which geometric elements frame a blank space allotted for text. As an outcome of this meeting, on November 20, 1920, the newsletter of the Vitebsk Creative Committees announced that "the Literary Publishing House of the Political Administration of the western front printed a group of Suprematist posters based on sketches by UNOVIS."[13] Two of these posters are known: *Organize a "Week of the Red Gift"* (plate 6) and *Beat the Whites with the Red Wedge* (*Klinom krasnym bei belykh*; fig. 2). Both posters are signed with collective names: Committee for the Red Gift of the Political Administration of the Western Front and UNOVIS, respectively. In a letter of 1925, Lissitzky claimed authorship of the latter.[14] The former's attribution to Strzemiński is based on the fact that he was active designing Suprematist posters in Smolensk at the time, and the commission cited above, which was announced in a local newspaper.[15] But, given the collective nature of UNOVIS production, this and similar posters may have been designed by one or more members of the studio in Smolensk or Vitebsk.

Fig. 2
EL LISSITZKY
Beat the Whites with the Red Wedge (*Klinom krasnym bei belykh*), 1920
Lithograph
20⅞ × 27⅝" (53 × 70 cm)
Publisher: Litizdat. Politupravleniia Zapfronta, Vitebsk and UNOVIS, Vitebsk
Russian State Library, Moscow. Reg. no. 5370-55

Another poster printed by ROSTA and often credited to Strzemiński is *The Red Army Is Heroically Fighting at the Front* (*Krasnaia armiia geroicheski srazhaetsia na fronte*, 1920; plate 7). This sheet seems to contain two discrete compositions: one employing figurative frames with text above, and an abstract, text-free Suprematist composition below.[16] Two examples are known of the lower section of the composition, each with a different slogan printed at the center: "And what have you done for the front?" asks one (fig. 3), while the other declares: "Increasing production, increasing success at work is the best basis for success on the front!"[17] There are visual connections between the stylistically disparate upper and lower parts of the image, which might suggest that pairing a typical ROSTA format of several frames accompanied by an agitational text (a schema pioneered by Vladimir Mayakovsky) with a Suprematist format might have been a product of collective creative work.

The Red Army poster's composition is unified formally and symbolically by the color red, tying together the Red Army, the red frontline, and the red rear guard, while calling for readers' support in red text.[18] The figure of the soldier around which the poster's narrative is centered was a standard trope in ROSTA posters.[19] In the upper left panel, the worker's red body in a white apron contrasts with the background made up of geometric elements that are reminiscent of a Suprematist composition—a visual link to the abstract design at the lower part of the poster and an indication that the work's stylistic eclecticism may well have been deliberate.

In 1920 the artistic environment in Smolensk was pluralistic and tolerant; artists working in styles ranging from academic naturalism to abstraction exhibited together. In 1921, however, the atmosphere would change dramatically. In the spring of 1921, Valentin Astrov, editor-in-chief of the Smolensk daily *Rabochiii put'* (Worker's path), sent a letter to the central publication of Narkompros, *Pechat' i revolutsiia* (Printing and revolution), denouncing "Suprematist-Futurist 'agitational posters'" produced by the IZO studio in Smolensk as ineffective at best and counterrevolutionary at worst.[20] Astrov's disdain was symptomatic of a growing official intolerance toward Suprematism (and abstraction generally) in provincial areas of the Soviet Union.

In 1921 Narkompros came under tighter control from Moscow; it was restructured and most leftist artists were pushed away from influential positions in it.[21] Moreover, conditions in the region were difficult—including a period of severe famine—and Strzemiński and Kobro made plans to move west. In late 1921 or early 1922 they left Smolensk and illegally crossed the border into Poland.

Strzemiński's political choices may seem paradoxical: although of Polish descent himself, he sided unwaveringly with the Red Army in its fight against Poland. Yet his choices were also emblematic of his time and place. Born of Polish nobility in Minsk—then part of the Russian Empire—Strzemiński followed in his father's footsteps, serving as an officer in the Russian Tsarist army, but after the Russian Revolution he embraced the transformative possibilities it offered. His primary fealty was not to a state, nor to a political regime as such, but rather to free artistic expression and to the possibility of transforming society through a radically new visual idiom of abstraction that was supported during the early years of Bolshevik leadership. For Strzemiński and Kobro, as for many fellow artists from a gamut of ethnic, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds, abstraction offered a supra-linguistic, supra-nationalistic visual syntax, and they continued to pursue its cause in their work, transposed to Poland, as founders of the Blok and a.r. groups going forward.[22]

Fig. 3
Attributed to WLADYSLAW STRZEMIŃSKI
And What Have You Done for the Front? Give Your Last Possessions to Those Who Are Dying Defending You (*A chto ty sdelal dlia fronta? Otdai poslednee tem, kto umiraet, zashchishchaia tebia*), 1920
Lithograph
Publisher: SmolROSTA (Smolensk Office of Russian Telegraph Agency)
8⅞ × 17⅞" (22.5 × 45.4 cm)
The State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow

1. El Lissitzky, speech at Pervaia Vserossiiskaia konferentsiia uchashchikh i uchashchikhsia iskusstvu, June 8, 1920. GARF F. A-2306 op. 23, d. 116, l. 150, quoted in Igor' Smekalov, "Ot Imeni UNOVISa . . . ," in *Arkhiv N.I. Khardzhieva: Russkii avangard; Materialy i dokumenty iz sobraniia RGALI*, vol. 2 (Moscow: Defi, 2018), p. 143. (This and all other quoted Russian passages in this essay are trans. by author.)
2. The Russian civil war took place between 1918 and 1921. Various groups opposing Bolshevik power, including monarchists, militarists, separatists, Socialist revolutionaries, and foreign nations, were collectively known as the Whites, while the Bolsheviks were known as the Reds.
3. See V. N. Osokin, B. F. Rybchenkov, et al. *Khudozhniki zemli Smolenskoi* (Leningrad: Khudozhnik RSFSR, 1967), p. 81.
4. In her 1949 curriculum vitae, Kobro writes of designing propaganda posters for political education. See Zenobia Karnicka, "Chronology of Kobro's Life and Work," in *Katarzyna Kobro, 1898–1951* (Leeds, U.K.: Henry Moore Institute, 1999), p. 33. There is documentary evidence that in September 1920 Kobro was directly engaged in creating works in support of the Red Army's military maneuvers. See Andrzej Turowski, *Malewicz w Warszawie* (Krakow: Universitas, 2004), p. 238. Other possible collaborators are Boris Rybchenkov, Mikhail Tsekhanovskiy and Cheslav Stefanskiy. See Osokin, Rybchenkov, et al., *Khudozhniki zemli Smolenskoi*, pp. 52–86.
5. Malevich was dispatched as well, but did not travel. See Irina Vakar and Tatiana Mikheenko, eds., *Malevich o sebe, Sovremenniki o Maleviche* (Moscow: RA, 2004), vol. 1, pp. 416–17.
6. No photographic evidence of these works survives, but at the time Dmitriev noted: "We artists have renounced our personalities, we kill ourselves, we only combine simple lines, simple planes." V. Dmitriev, "Da zdravstvuet kommunal'noe iskusstvo," *Zvezda* [Minsk] (February 23, 1919), cited in Viacheslav V. Shamshur, "Agitatsionno-massovoe iskusstvo poslerevolutsionnogo Minska" *Iskusstvo i kul'tura* 3, no. 7 (2012): 62.
7. Strzeminski's report to IZO Narkompros, March 14, 1919, in Vakar and Mikheenko, eds., *Malevich o sebe,* vol. 1, pp. 416–17.
8. Ibid.
9. This photograph has been identified as made in Vitebsk in publications by Alexandra Shatskikh and Aleksandr Lisov, but specialists on Vitebsk and Smolensk of that period (including Shatskikh, Ludmila Khmel'nitskaia, and Viacheslav Shamshur) believe that it may have been taken in Smolensk. Shatskikh, Khmel'nitskaia, and Shamshur, correspondence with the author, September 2019.
10. "Khudozhestvennye masterskie ROSTA." The first two words are difficult to decipher with complete certainty.
11. UNOVIS, *Listok Vitebskogo Tvorkoma*, no. 1 (November 20, 1920), n.p.
12. Its subjects included "The headquarters of the Proletarian Revolution of the Third International," "Youth will bring about Communist Society," "Soviet Power is the way toward collective creativity." *Rabochii put'*, no. 256 (November 4, 1920): 3.
13. UNOVIS, *Listok Vitebskogo Tvorkoma*, no. 1 (November 20, 1920), n.p.
14. El Lissitzky, letter to Jan Tschichold, July 22, 1925, in *Situating El Lissitzky: Vitebsk, Berlin, Moscow*, ed. Nancy Perloff and Brian Reed (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2003), p. 243.
15. *Rabochii put'*, no. 256 (November 4, 1920): 3.
16. Soviet art historian Boris S. Butnik-Siverskii surmised that the lower composition was printed on the same sheet as the main poster and its open-ended layout was intended for printing a slogan. See Butnik-Siverskii, *Sovetskii plakat epokhi grazhdanskoi voiny, 1918–1921* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Vsesoiuznoi Knizhnoi Palaty, 1960), no. 1238, p. 267.
17. The latter is reproduced in Larissa A. Zhadova, *Suche und Experiment* (Dresden: Verlag der Kunst, 1978), plate 172, n.p.
18. By 1920 the Red Army's resources were depleted and the Soviet government issued repeated pleas to the population to support it, both by volunteering to join its ranks and by donating money and material goods.
19. Butnik-Siverskii claims that it was in fact repurposed from a poster for the Polish front, created in Moscow by Ivan Maliutin and Mayakovsky. Butnik-Siverskii, *Sovetskii plakat*, pp. 84, 267.
20. V[alentin] Astrov, "Ob Agitplakate (Pis'mo iz Smolenska)," *Pechat' i revoliutsiia* (May–June 1921): 190.
21. Andrei Krusanov, *Russkii avangard* (Moscow: NLO, 2003), vol. 2, book 2, pp. 476–79.
22. On the founders of Blok, see Jennifer Tobias's essay in the present volume, pp. 152–55.

DMITRII MOOR
8 Maquette for the poster *The Soviet Turnip*, c. 1920
Gouache and ink on paper
24 × 19¼" (60.9 × 48.9 cm)

VLADIMIR MAYAKOVSKY
9 *To the Polish Front! Hurry Up! Get Your Guns! Unless You Want to be under Polish Oppression!*, 1920
Poster for ROSTA (Russian Telegraph Agency)
Lithograph
20⅞ × 27⅞" (53 × 70.8 cm)

VLADIMIR KOZLINSKII
10 *The Kronstadt Card Is Trumped!*, 1921
Poster for Petrograd office of ROSTA (Russian Telegraph Agency)
Linoleum cut with watercolor additions
Composition: 18⅝ × 11⅝" (47.1 × 29.5 cm); sheet: 24½ × 13¾" (62.2 × 35 cm)

VLADIMIR KOZLINSKII
11 *Despite Three Years of Efforts by Our Enemies from All Around the World to Defeat Us, the Revolution Is Advancing in Giant Steps!*, c. 1920
Poster for Petrograd office of ROSTA (Russian Telegraph Agency)
Linoleum cut
28⅛ × 19⅝" (71.4 × 49.8 cm)

GUSTAV KLUTSIS

ELECTRIFICATION OF THE ENTIRE COUNTRY

c. 1920

MARIA GOUGH

Maximum contrast. Unexpected juxtaposition. Disruption of scale. These are the defining principles of photomontage, according to the Latvian-born, Moscow-based artist Gustav Klutsis, the leading Soviet photomonteur of the interwar period. Forged in the context of contemporary art's efforts to destroy what he described as "the age-old conventions of representation, perspective, and proportion," Klutsis's earliest photo-collages are conversant with Cubist *papiers collés*, Kazimir Malevich's Suprematism, El Lissitzky's axonometric reinterpretation of Suprematism, and perhaps also—although the artist might have denied it—Dadaist photomontage. For Klutsis, the photographic fragment serves as both material and image, in accordance with, on the one hand, his early preoccupation with *faktura* ("texture," but also "material," and the way in which it is worked), and, on the other, his nascent interest in the photograph's capacity for what critic Osip Brik would describe as the precise fixation of fact.[1]

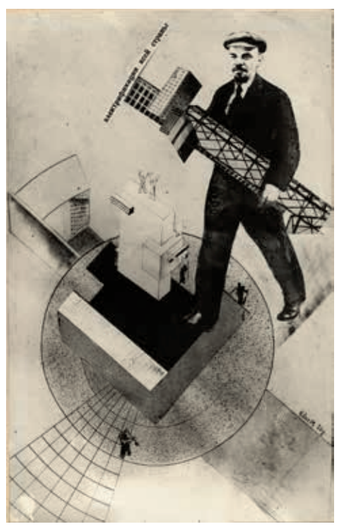
Exemplary in this regard is *Dynamic City* (*Dinamicheskii gorod*, 1919; fig. 1), in which Klutsis spins an assortment of plain, painted, speckled, metallic, photographic, and once transparent papers on a black circle, building a new world unmarked by hierarchy, orientation, or perspective. ("I am constructing a new reality not yet in existence," he wrote to his fellow artist and beloved, Valentina Kulagina, in 1921.)[2] Four Lilliputian figures cut from print media join the artist in this labor. One of them—only a trace of which now remains—is positioned upside down, resisting the force of gravity and thus underscoring the work's thematic of rotation, both of the new world and of the sheet itself. Klutsis suggested that *Dynamic City* should be looked at from all sides, echoing Lissitzky's recommendation that his own lithograph *Proun 1* (1919–21) be rotated by the viewer through 360 degrees.[3]

Sharing some of this layered materiality and utopian ambition is Klutsis's *Electrification of the Entire Country* (*Elektrifikatsiia vsei strany*; plate 12), which was first dated to 1920 and described as a design for a poster in a checklist prepared c. 1935–36 for the artist's ultimately unrealized retrospective exhibition.[4] Here, a scarlet rectangle is mounted over a smaller black rectangle and several (now deteriorated) papers in various shades of gray. While the papers appear planar in dimension, an archival photograph (fig. 2) reveals that they originally composed an axonometric volume flanking the red rectangle's lower side. In its upper corner is pasted a piece of photographic paper cut in the shape of a Malevichean *arkhitekton*: a centripetal accumulation of unpainted plaster cubes and parallelepipeds of various sizes and dimensions, proposed as a model for a nonutilitarian architecture. Upon this Klutsis has drawn a cluster of smaller axonometric volumes in ink and pencil to form a cantilevered building;[5] jutting out from its left edge is a tiny sliver of an American skyscraper. In contrast to the intarsia of *Dynamic City*, the combination of elements here creates an almost traversable, if still abstract, space. This space sits upon an airbrushed gray circle, the outer perimeter of which is bracketed on the lower right by a section of (now damaged) photographic paper, on the lower left by a perspective grid, and on the upper left by a combination of pencil drawing and a photographic shard detailing the façade of a skyscraper. Five tiny figures—one most likely cut from a magazine, two from photographic paper that has since deteriorated to white, and two hand-drawn on paper—are dispersed but consistent in their orientation. Onto this new world strides Lenin, a colossus composed of two heavily retouched and now extremely silvered photographs: his body is from a little-known snapshot by one N. Smirnov, while his head is from a photograph taken at the Kremlin by Pyotr Otsup or A. F. Vinkler. In the work's original state, Lenin's right leg was

GUSTAV KLUTSIS
12 *Electrification of the Entire Country*, c. 1920
Cut-and-pasted gelatin silver prints, printed and painted paper on paper with gouache, ink, and pencil
18⅜ × 10¹³⁄₁₆" (46.5 × 27.5 cm)

Fig. 1
GUSTAV KLUTSIS
Dynamic City (*Dinamicheskii gorod*), 1919
Photomontage, collage, gouache, pencil, and aluminum foil on paper
14 13/16 × 10 3/16" (37.6 × 25.8 cm)
Latvian National Museum of Art, Riga. Inv. no. VMM Z-6701

Fig. 2
Archival photograph of Klutsis's photomontage
Electrification of the Entire Country, 1920
Latvian National Museum of Art, Riga. Inv. no. VMM Z-8750/15



pasted atop the assembled papers, rather than tucked behind them as it is now; the top of his right foot was poised to land on the red, in fact, thereby bringing all rotation to a halt.

As the archival photograph of the work shows, Lenin originally carried an unwieldy agglomeration of modern architectural elements, in which a large section of electrical pylon is crowned by a cluster of skyscraper façades shooting off in all directions, and the printed phrase "Electrification of the entire country" (a shortened version of his famous dictum "Communism = Soviet power plus the electrification of the entire country"). This is a reference to Lenin's signature policy, announced in July 1920, calling for the creation of a nationwide electrical grid, which he believed was essential to securing the revolution for the Bolshevik side: it would enable the modernization of the country's industrial infrastructure, and thereby ensure desperately needed economic growth; it would also facilitate the transmission of party propaganda to remote regions, where political support was crucial but often difficult to win. Klutsis's Lenin thus delivers electricity to the new world under construction; two tiny workers welcome their leader with upraised arms, as if surrendering their agency to his electro-political power.

Electrification exemplifies Klutsis's dual inspirations and commitments in the early 1920s. On the one hand, he was a satellite member of UNOVIS (Affirmers of the New Art), the radical collective of artists gathered in Vitebsk around Malevich, with whom he had taken a studio at Moscow's VKhUTEMAS (Higher State Artistic and Technical Workshops) in 1919. UNOVIS dedicated itself, inter alia, to the redeployment of the abstract language of Suprematism for explicitly agitational purposes, as in Lissitzky's poster *Beat the Whites with the Red Wedge* (*Klinom krasnym bei belykh*, 1920; see p. 56, fig. 2). While the political convictions of its members ranged from anarchist to Socialist to Communist, and ebbed and flowed over time, the collective also sometimes styled itself as an autonomous "Party of Art" dedicated to the notion of a Suprematist world revolution. On the other hand, Klutsis enrolled in the Russian Communist Party in 1919, and was committed to working on its behalf. *Electrification* brings these two distinct—if sometimes overlapping—forces into contact with one another. But it does so in a way that is quite different from, say, *Beat the Whites*. Whereas Lissitzky repurposes Suprematist abstraction itself for politics, *Electrification* unexpectedly and disjunctively juxtaposes that same abstraction with an iconography of power vested in an omnipotent Lenin rendered photographically.

Lenin himself was strongly opposed to such iconography; partly for this reason, relatively few photographs of him circulated in the press before his withdrawal from public life in 1922 due to a stroke. After his death in January 1924, however, the floodgates opened. The very next month, Klutsis began work on an extensive Lenin series, starting with his photomontage illustrations for a special Lenin double issue of the journal *Molodaia gvardiia* (Young guard; fig. 3), published in February–March 1924 in an edition of twenty thousand copies. Klutsis produced eleven full-page montages for this commemorative issue, each a hagiographic mélange of photographs and Constructivist graphics. Three of these montages include the striding Lenin of Smirnov's photograph—exploiting the reproducibility that lies at the heart of the medium—while a fourth includes the figure of Lenin from the Otsup/Vinkler photograph. *Molodaia gvardiia* was a relatively new, state-sponsored journal focused on politics, literature, and technology for a youth readership: "We want to become an organ of *revolutionary education*, of ideological-political armament for the young detachments of the working class," its editors had written in its inaugural issue of January 1923.[6] Yet the journal was also pluralist in terms of authorship, publishing diverse literary tendencies, from Komsomol writers to the Lef group to Proletkul't; this pluralism was reflected in the commissioning of Klutsis and his colleague Sergei Sen'kin—both of whom had recently called for the creation of a Workshop of the Revolution (Masterskaia revoliutsii) at the VKhUTEMAS and were associated with Lef—not only to produce an illustration program but also to design the issue itself.

Fig. 3
GUSTAV KLUTSIS
Photomontage illustrated in *Molodaia gvardiia* (Young guard), 1924
Journal with eighteen letterpress illustrations (including cover)
Page: 10 1/4 × 6 13/16" (26 × 17.3 cm)
The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of The Judith Rothschild Foundation

Electrification is thus a hybrid of two aesthetic and historical moments in Klutsis's trajectory: while its Suprematism places it close to *Dynamic City*, its monumental figure brings to mind the artist's Lenin series and the broader phenomenon of Leniniana that accelerated exponentially after January 1924. How might one account for this asynchronicity? Perhaps the colossus in *Electrification* was simply ahead of its time—evidence that Klutsis, as a vanguard artist, had anticipated the Lenin cult of the future.[7] Another possible explanation would be that *Electrification* was the product of two campaigns: it was begun in the spirit of UNOVIS in 1920 but completed only after Lenin's death, when Klutsis was absorbed in memorializing him for a mass readership. Such dual campaigns were not unheard of, as the production of the Atelier Lissitzky's *Orator's Podium* (*Rednertribüne*, 1924), for example, demonstrates.

I have found no such smoking gun for *Electrification*, but several points support my contention that it conjoins two distinct historical moments: (1) With only one possible exception,[8] there are no monumental figures, whether photographic or drawn, in Klutsis's work before 1924. (2) Lenin is pasted on top of the Suprematist ensemble rather than integrated within it; this contrasts strongly with the painstaking, almost intarsia-like way in which the artist constructed his works in 1919–21. (3) In a talk he presented to the Kommunisticheskaia akademiia (Communist Academy) in Moscow in 1931, Klutsis set forth a defense of the agitational efficacy of the medium of photomontage, asserting that, in his own trajectory, photomontage *first* became a weapon of agitation and propaganda in 1922. (4) In that same talk, he referred to his 1924 Lenin illustrations as "works of so-called photo-slogan photomontage," and described them as "the *first* attempt," on his part, "to reveal the essence of Leninism, interweaving political slogans with visual means of expression."[9]

Although the c. 1935–36 checklist's entry for *Electrification* describes it as a design for a poster, no such poster has come to light. That in itself is not uncommon. But aside from that entry—formulated at a moment when Klutsis was struggling to assert the political efficacy of his medium in the context of its increasing marginalization due to the reintroduction of a hierarchy of media in the mid-1930s[10]—there is no evidence that *Electrification* was ever intended for mass consumption. If my suggestion that it was begun in 1920 and completed c. 1924 is plausible, then *Electrification* could not have been a maquette for a poster proselytizing for Lenin's electrification policy, at least not at the time of the latter's announcement at the Eighth Congress of the Soviets in July 1920.

What is it, then? I propose that *Electrification*, in uniting Suprematism and Leniniana, might best be understood as something like a private act of mourning on Klutsis's part, perhaps one produced more or less contemporaneously with his mass-circulation memorialization of Lenin in *Molodaia gvardiia*, but quite different in its composition, materiality, sensibility, and affect. Klutsis had first come to Moscow in 1918 as a member of the ninth regiment of Latvian riflemen that guarded Lenin in the Kremlin; unsurprisingly, therefore, his death moved the artist deeply: "Ilich is dead," Kulagina wrote in her diary. "An oppressive feeling, a kind of sadness, as if for a loved one. People queue up outside the House of Unions [where Lenin's body lay in state] day and night. I went twice and didn't get in; the third time Gustav and I got in. It was quiet and solemn, you pass by holding your breath. . . . There were tears in my eyes. . . . Gustav later said he had tears coming on too."[11] What better way for the artist to mourn Lenin's passing than to conjoin—unexpectedly and disjunctively—the two major inspirations and commitments of his own early years in Moscow, as he made his way forward in a foreign country that had opened vast new horizons for him: the UNOVIS collective and Communism, as personified in the body of the Bolshevik leader.

1. Quotations are from Gustav Klutsis, "Fotomontazh kak novyi vid agitatsionnogo iskusstva," in *Izofront* (Moscow: Ogiz-Izogiz, 1931), pp. 124, 126; trans. (slightly modified) in Iveta Derkusova, ed., *Gustavs Klucis* (Riga, Latvia: Latvijas Nacionālais mākslas muzejs, 2014), vol. 1, p. 81.
2. Gustav Klutsis, letter to Valentina Kulagina, January 5, 1921, quoted in Larisa Oginskaia, *Gustav Klutsis* (Moscow: Sovetskii khudozhnik, 1981), p. 51. (Trans. by author.)
3. Lissitzky's *Proun 1* is reproduced in Angelica Zander Rudenstine, ed., *Russian Avant-Garde Art: The George Costakis Collection* (New York: Abrams, 1981), p. 246, plate no. 455.
4. "Spisok rabot khudozhnika KLUTSIS G. G. 1918–1935 g.g.," n.d. [c. 1935–36], typescript, Mayakovsky Museum, Moscow.
5. The siting of this building on the red rectangle immediately brings to mind a page ("and on the black settles red") from Lissitzky's *Pro dva kvadrata* (*About Two Squares*), 1920 [1922]).
6. Quoted in Evgeny Dobrenko, *The Making of the State Writer*, trans. Jesse M. Savage (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), p. 137.
7. Victoria Bonnell argues that "Klutsis anticipated several later developments in visual Leniniana"; see her *Iconography of Power: Soviet Political Posters under Lenin and Stalin* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), p. 145.
8. The possible exception is Klutsis's *Mir starii i mir, vnov' stroiashchiisia*, the date of which is in question.
9. Gustav Klutsis, "Fotomontazh, kak novaia problema agitatsionnogo iskusstva," *Literatura i iskusstvo*, nos. 9–10 (1931): 87; trans. in Derkusova, *Gustavs Klucis*, vol. 1, p. 123.
10. See Maria Gough, "From Machine to Easel," in Derkusova, *Gustavs Klucis*, vol. 1, pp. 26–51.
11. Valentina Kulagina, diary entry, December 23, 1924 (this entry seems to have been misdated; the more likely date is January 23, 1924), trans. Cathy Young, in Margarita Tupitsyn, *Gustav Klutsis and Valentina Kulagina: Photography and Montage after Constructivism* (Göttingen and New York: Steidl; International Center of Photography, 2004), p. 175.

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Front cover:
JOHN HEARTFIELD
The Hand Has Five Fingers (detail), 1928
Campaign poster for German Communist Party
Lithograph
38½ × 29¼" (97.8 × 74.3 cm)
(See plate 154)

Back cover:
LIUBOV POPOVA
Production Clothing for Actor No. 7 (detail), 1922 (inscribed 1921)
Gouache, cut-and-pasted colored paper, ink, and pencil on paper
12¹⁵⁄₁₆ × 9⅛" (32.8 × 23.1 cm)
(See plate 13)

Front endpapers:
John Heartfield's poster (plate 154) installed on a Berlin street for the Reichstag election of May 20, 1928.
May 1928.
Photograph by George Pahl
Bundesarchiv, Koblenz

Back endpapers:
The Mayor (Aleksei Temerin), Guards, and Peasant Women, in Vsevolod Meyerhold's production of Fernand Crommelynck's *The Magnanimous Cuckold*, Zon Theater, Moscow. 1922.
Photograph by Ya. M. Tolchan
A. A. Bakhrushin State Central Theatre Museum, Moscow

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Untitled (self-portrait) (detail), c. 1930.
Vintage gelatin silver print, 9⅝ × 7⅛" (24.4 × 18.1 cm)
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Women Shockworkers, Fortify Your Shockworker Brigades, Master Technology, Increase the Cadres of Proletariat Specialists (detail). 1931. (See plate 53)
p. 5: GUSTAV KLUTSIS
Electrification of the Entire Country (detail). c. 1920. (See plate 12)
p. 6: SOLOMON TELINGATER
Promotional design for Red Army Theater (detail). c. 1934. (See plate 77)
p. 7: SOLOMON TELINGATER
Promotional design for the play *The Destruction of the Squadron*, by Oleksandr Korniychuk, Central Theater of the Red Army (detail). c. 1934. (See plate 80)
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Study Technology, Master Science (detail). 1933. (See plate 68)
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