

FUTURIST POETS AND PAINTERS

1910–16

The first collection of Futurist poetry, *A Trap for Judges* (1910; p. 63), marked the initial collaboration of David and Nikolai Burluik, Elena Guro, Vasilii Kamenskii, and Velimir Khlebnikov. These poets became known as the Gileia group. *A Trap for Judges* was followed by the well-known collaborative publication, *A Slap in the Face of Public Taste* (1912; p. 63), which advocates the overthrow of the “classics of the past,” attacks the “idols of the present,” and orders that poets’ rights “be revered.” *A Slap* was the first in a series of Futurist books of 1910–16 that produced an effect analogous to the *succès de scandale* of the exhibitions of the avant-garde painters.

The interconnection between poetry and art in Russia was reflected in the articles and manifestoes of the avant-garde, the result being daring experiments in the creation of unique genres such as the Futurist theater and the Futurist book. This interconnection was expressed in the “linguistic” consciousness of the early avant-garde, manifest in a tendency to expand the domains of the poetic and visual languages and in the gravitation of painters toward poetic forms and of poets toward visual categories.

The Futurist poets, many of whom began their careers as painters (the Burliuks, Guro, Aleksei Kruchenykh, and Vladimir Mayakovsky), were in constant collaboration with avant-garde artists from the Union of Youth group (among them Pavel Filonov, Nikolai Kul'bin, and Olga Rozanova) in St. Petersburg and Mikhail Larionov's group of Neo-primitivists in Moscow (Natalia Goncharova, Il'ia Zdanevich, and others). Larionov and Goncharova—the first collaborators on Kruchenykh's and Khlebnikov's texts—created the visual conception of lithographic publications from which all subsequent ones derived. From 1913 on, most of Kruchenykh's and Khlebnikov's books were designed by Rozanova, whose major contributions included a strong injection of color, the introduction of the rare printing technique of hectography, and the innovative use of linoleum cut. In 1913–14 Kasimir Malevich introduced the theory of Alogism in art, which had an enormous impact on the development toward abstraction in visual terms as well as in poetry. The poet Kamenskii was also a daring experimenter in the visual mode, combating the monotony of ordinary typography by unconventional distributions of words on a page and the mixing of different fonts.

The improvisations that these artists and poets brought to the book form drew from the most disparate of sources: from neolithic sculptures, cliff drawings, and Chinese calligraphy, to medieval illuminated manuscripts, and the richly visual *lubki* (popular, inexpensive prints). They found inspiration in the shocking minimalist “fence graffiti,” copied from the walls of soldiers barracks, as well as in the refined poetic manuscript style evident in the works of the French Symbolists. While they expressed a knowledge of purely Western models, by and large, they rejected them. In Russian Futurist books a letter or a word was to be perceived as a painterly theme (word-image), and individual pages were accorded the status of unique artworks. The Futurist poets' principle of incompleteness or implication imparted ambiguity to the work and afforded the viewer the possibility of various interpretations. Nikolai Burluik once compared a word to a “living organism,” and the same may be said of these lithographed books.

N. G.

THE THEME OF WAR

1914–16

Russian military success at the beginning of World War I inspired a wave of politically engaged and readily available art: *lubki* (prints), postcards, brochures, and albums, all reflecting the subject of war. The war immediately became a major topic of discussion among the leaders of the avant-garde. Vladimir Mayakovsky and Kazimir Malevich, among others, attempted to revive the *lubok* genre in their colorful posters and postcards based on military themes and published by *Segodniashnii lubok* (Today's Lubok) (see p. 98). The subject of war afforded an immediate opportunity to infuse social content into artistic experiments, and the creation of new forms was harnessed to the search for an expressive language in which to portray the growing anxieties of twentieth-century society.

Among the most profound and unique artistic responses to the war were Natalia Goncharova's series of lithographs, *Mystical Images of War* (1914; pp. 95–97); Olga Rozanova's portfolio *War* (1916; pp. 100–102); and Aleksei Kruchenykh's album of collages entitled *Universal War* (1916; pp. 103–05). They represent three different artistic approaches to the theme, reflecting Neo-primitivist, Futurist, and Suprematist aesthetics.

Goncharova, in her epic treatment of war, combined innovation with traditional forms, particularly icons and *lubki*. However, her series has nothing in common with a pseudo-folk style or with the propaganda spirit of posters or postcards. In her *Mystical Images*, a sense of ritual performance dominates the cycle. Goncharova creates her own mythology of war, combining the revived heraldry of the Russian coat of arms ("The White Eagle"), symbols of Britain and France ("The British Lion" and "The French Cock"), apocalyptic images ("The Doomed City" and "The Pale Horse"), and recognizable details of present-day military uniforms, factory smokestacks, and airplanes. A keen awareness of history emerges through visual allusions and allegories. Goncharova chose for her series a dramatic contrast of black and white, but also hand-colored four copies.

Unlike Goncharova's war epics, which are rooted in a Neo-primitivist aesthetic, Rozanova's *War* is subjective and elusive. Her color linoleum cuts accompanying Kruchenykh's poetry were conceived within the artistic current of Futurism, drawing inspiration directly from the present. She combines the stringent documentary quality of newspaper chronicles ("Excerpt from a Newspaper Bulletin") with elements of the romantic grotesque and the fantastic ("Airplanes over the City"). In a collage for the cover, she clearly applied her knowledge of Suprematism. In its solemn simplicity of colors and shapes, this work can be compared with Kazimir Malevich's Suprematist canvases shown at the *Last Futurist Exhibition of Pictures: 0.10* of 1915.

This abstract collage by Rozanova served as the prototype for Kruchenykh's album *Universal War*. Here Kruchenykh creates a totally abstract anti-utopian prophesy of a "universal" war, utilizing pure rhythm, form, and color. One of the outstanding merits of this album, which appeared at the same time as Jean (Hans) Arp's first Dadaist collages, and thirty years before Henri Matisse's celebrated *Jazz* series, is its implementation of the concept of collage as an artistic metaphor for the discordant concordance of the epoch. In Kruchenykh's album, collage as an artistic method transcends mere technique. N. G.

A REVOLUTION OF THE PRINTED WORD 1917–24

Tiflis (now Tbilisi), the capital of the Georgian Republic, was a hotbed of literary and artistic activity for a few years after the Revolution. Between 1917 and 1921, under the moderate rule of the Mensheviks, it was a place of relative freedom, and a number of Russian avant-gardists took up residence there. The central figure was Il'ia Zdanevich, a native of Tiflis who was enamored of Italian Futurism and became an expert in innovative typographic techniques that emulated, and in some cases surpassed, the Italians. Aleksei Kruchenykh, Igor' Terent'ev, Zdanevich, and others formed the avant-garde group 41°, which was centered at the Fantastic Tavern, a cabaret in a downtown Tiflis basement. The group propagated *zaum* (transrational or “beyond reason” language), and their influence had an unprecedented effect on the international literary climate of the city.

In the area of book works, this period produced some spectacularly innovative results. On one avant-garde extreme were the elaborate typographic publications produced by Zdanevich. Among these is the anthology *To Sofia Georgievna Melnikova: The Fantastic Tavern* (1919; p. 122) with its multiple languages and carefully chosen typefaces and paper. This anthology includes a particularly fine fold-out typographic composition, including collage, by Zdanevich. In addition to publications of his own one-act plays, which culminated in the Paris edition of his *Lidantiu as a Beacon* (1923; p. 126), Zdanevich also designed and supervised editions of works by Kruchenykh. The trademark features of Zdanevich's hand are a multiplicity of typefaces on a single page, an expressive choice of typefaces, and unorthodox positioning of text segments (both vertically and diagonally).

On the opposite extreme were the very simply made “hctograph” books of Kruchenykh duplicated on a mimeograph-like machine, or by hand, using carbon paper, but with equally avant-garde content (pp. 112–17). In these modest-looking booklets, Kruchenykh violated nearly all the rules of Gutenbergian book production by mixing papers, haphazardly varying duplication techniques, inserting pieces of one book into another, and varying the contents and order of the pages from one copy to another of the “same” work. The textual components of the pages were typically treated as independent units to be shuffled at will and looked upon at least as much as visual artifacts as words to be read. Many pages consist of minimalist compositions of letters and simple graphic elements. Some pages are entirely blank. Neither of these two extremes has been surpassed since.

Somewhere in between is the distinctive lithographed work of 1917, entitled *1918* (p. 107), produced by Kruchenykh in collaboration with Vasilii Kamenskii and Zdanevich's artist brother Kirill. This book is unusual in its size and format, with many pages having two panels mounted next to each other on heavy brown wrapping paper, one panel showing a poem by Kruchenykh or Kamenskii, the other an abstract drawing, both done by Kirill. The work also includes two full-spread panels, one an evocation of Tiflis itself, conceived by Kamenskii and executed by Kirill and Kamenskii, and the other a visual poem-diagram with the sun, all by Kamenskii.

By 1921 Zdanevich, Kruchenykh, and other key avant-garde figures had left Tiflis, Georgia came under Soviet control, and a brilliant but brief period of cultural activity ended.

G. J.

VERNACULAR VARIATIONS AND JUDAICA 1916–23

Through lecture tours, performances, and independent travel, David Burliuk, Vasili Kamenskii, and Vladimir Mayakovsky brought Futurism beyond the main centers of Moscow and Petrograd. By the end of the second decade of the twentieth century, Futurist-inspired publications distinguished by the use of everyday materials and by handmade production methods appeared in Kharkov, Sevastopol, and Vladivostok while continuing in Moscow and Petrograd. Unique elements of collage are found on Mariia Siniakova's cover for *The Fourth Book of Verse: I Love Your Eyes!* (1916; p. 132), on Vasili Kamenskii's *Barefoot Girls* (1917; p. 134), and on Vasil' Iermilov's cover for the *Verse of Ekaterina Neimaer* (1920; p. 133). Hand-coloring appears on Iermilov's cover for *Ladimir* (1920; p. 133) and hand-drawn lettering on his cover for *Seven Plus Three* (1918; p. 133). A severe paper shortage and general lack of resources sharply reduced the number of books published in these years, and limited their formats as well as edition sizes of some titles. *Ladimir*, for example, was printed in fifty copies, with the help of Iermilov's brother, who worked in the lithography shop of the Southern Railroad.

These handmade features and a relatively "primitive" style suggest the continued legacy of popular folk art forms, especially that of the *lubok* (woodcut print). The *lubok* influence is particularly apparent in works published by the artists' collective Segodnia (Today) in Petrograd (pp. 131, 132). Founded by Vera Ermolaeva in 1918, Segodnia published poems, short stories, children's tales, and even a translation of Walt Whitman's *Pioneers* (p. 131), all illustrated with linoleum cuts, many of them hand-colored.

The Jewish books from approximately the same period were also strongly influenced by traditional art forms and motifs. The earliest books shown here appeared in 1917 in the wake of the February Revolution, after a 1915 ban on Yiddish and Hebrew publications was rescinded. A Jewish cultural renaissance had been underway since 1916, as poets and artists expressed a desire to create a new Jewish culture. With the ban lifted, Yiddish publishing houses produced children's books, cultural journals, and collections of poetry and folk tales, illustrated and designed by El Lissitzky, Natan Al'tman, and Marc Chagall, among others. In addition to Russian folk art forms, the artists drew upon traditional Jewish iconography found on ritual objects and gravestones and in synagogues, incorporating them into their own designs, as seen in Lissitzky's logo for the Idish (Yiddish) publishing house (p. 141). Inspired by the rich graphic rhythms, stresses, and accents of Hebrew script, the artists also paid particular attention to the expressive potential of the physical form of words and letters, and sought a visual unity between text and imagery. Experiments with abstraction that Lissitzky and others would explore in their secular works starting in 1919 appear in some of these examples, most notably in the three-fold cover of Lissitzky's *The Tale of a Goat* (1919; pp. 138, 139) and *Ukrainian Folk Tales* (1922; p. 144) and the diagonal dynamism seen on Chagall's cover for *Stream* (1922; p. 143).

J. A.

SUPREMATISM AND THE NON-OBJECTIVE VISION 1916–32

Kazimir Malevich introduced Suprematism to the public in December 1915 at the *0.10* exhibition. In his brochure *From Cubism and Futurism to Suprematism* (p. 147), printed for the opening of the show, he described Suprematism as a non-objective art freed from any representation of objects and based on the purity of abstract geometric forms. This was the first publication to declare the new mode. In 1916 Aleksei Kruchenykh created an unprecedented visual model of a Suprematist book in his abstract collages for *Universal War* (pp. 103–05). He interpreted Suprematism as “transrational” painting based on Malevich’s notion that every painted surface is a living form, and every form constitutes a world.

Malevich considered his style as synthetic and universal: according to his utopian vision, Suprematism was to be applied to painting, sculpture, architecture, music, poetry, theater, and book design. These aspirations were partly realized in the activities of UNOVIS (Founders of the New Art), a group of revolutionary artists formed in 1920–22 in Vitebsk, where Malevich had gone to teach at the local art school in 1919. Among the members of UNOVIS were Il’ia Chashnik, Vera Ermolaeva, and El Lissitzky. As teachers they soon transformed the school into a new kind of art institution combining education and research with workshops in practical commissions. This utilitarian approach led members of UNOVIS to produce a table of Suprematist symbols which one could apply to decorating streets and designing posters, books, textile, porcelain, and other objects. A UNOVIS leaflet of 1919 proclaimed: “Wear the black square as a mark of the world economy. Draw the red square in your workshops as a mark of the world revolution in the arts.” Revolution affected both the social and aesthetic program of UNOVIS, provoking a deliberate transition in avant-garde self-image from individual consciousness to “collective creativity.” This unusual unison of different artistic voices marked their newsletter, *The Path of UNOVIS* (p. 152), and the almanac *UNOVIS*.

These publications, including Malevich’s *On New Systems in Art* (1919; p. 147) and *Suprematism: Thirty-Four Drawings* (1920; pp. 148–50), were supervised by Lissitzky, who directed the print workshop at Vitebsk. He compared a book to an architectural structure that should be built with the aid of typographic machinery, but could not achieve this ideal due to a shortage of equipment. Therefore, printed production, accomplished on the only available lithographic press, hardly corresponded to UNOVIS’s objective of the “creation of a contemporary type of book.” Lissitzky’s own Suprematist book was realized only later in his *Of Two Squares: A Suprematist Tale in Six Constructions* (1922; pp. 153–55): a book for children about two squares, black and red, that fly to earth from afar. Printed in Berlin, *A Suprematist Tale* unites the cosmic ideas of Suprematism and the Constructivist techniques of book design.

Malevich’s philosophy and practice of Suprematism inspired many individual approaches toward non-objectivity in art. Mikhail Matiushin’s theory of color was one of them. Matiushin’s non-objective vision was based on organic color forms as opposed to Malevich’s geometric abstractions. *A Guide to Color: Rules of the Variability of Color Combinations* (1932; pp. 156, 157), handmade by the teacher and his students, became one of the very last publications related to the early Russian avant-garde. N. G.

POPULAR REVOLUTIONARY IMAGERY

1918–32

In the wake of the October Revolution of 1917, Futurist artists and poets devoted themselves to liberating society from the bourgeois art of the past and creating in its place a proletarian art—a classless art, everywhere and for everyone. In the *Futurists' Newspaper* of 1918, Vladimir Mayakovsky urged readers to reject those who offer the “petrified fossils” of old art and instead embrace “the big healthy chunks of brutal art which we [Futurists] give you.” He further called upon artists and writers to bring forth their pots of paint and brushes “to illuminate all the sides, foreheads, and chests of cities, railway stations, and the ever-galloping herds of railway carriages,” and proclaimed, “All art to all the people!”

The Futurists found an ally in Anatolii Lunacharskii, the head of the People's Commissariat for Enlightenment, who in February 1918 established the Department of Fine Arts within the Commissariat. This department published three periodicals: *Fine Art*, only one issue of which appeared; *Art: Bulletin of the Department of Visual Arts in the People's Commissariat for Enlightenment* (p. 164); and *The Art of the Commune* (p. 164). Mayakovsky's well-known slogan “the streets are our brushes, the squares our palettes,” graced the cover of *Art of the Commune's* debut issue of December 7, 1918.

Lunacharskii also served as editor for *Rye-Word: A Futurists' Revolutionary Reader* (1918; p. 165), the first literary collection published and supported by the new government. *Rye-Word's* cover by Mayakovsky, featuring a crudely painted shaft of rye against a stark white background, evoked sustenance and nourishment to a culturally starved population.

In 1919, as the Bolsheviks fought to retain control of Russia and stave off an overthrow by the opposing White Army, Mayakovsky again assumed the role of patriotic propagandist, writing verse for the portfolio *Heroes and Victims of the Revolution: October 1917–1918* (1918; p. 160), and creating posters for the Russian Telegraph Agency (ROSTA), the organ responsible for post-revolutionary agitation and propaganda production.

The importance of ROSTA in promoting popular revolutionary imagery cannot be overlooked. The agency commissioned large propaganda posters to be displayed in empty shop windows at strategic points in major cities. Mayakovsky's earliest ROSTA posters (1919) were inspired by the traditional *lubok* (popular print), and showed caricatural images (of the soldier, and the bourgeois, for example) designed for instant recognition by an audience of passersby. Vladimir Lebedev, working for ROSTA in Petrograd, developed his own personal style, using brightly colored, geometric forms to address issues ranging from alcoholism to the worldwide struggle of communism against capitalism (pp. 160, 161).

Adol'f Strakhov's *Alphabet of the Revolution, 1917–1921* (1921; p. 159) and Mayakovsky's *The Soviet Alphabet* (1919; pp. 162, 163) were also tools of propaganda, with the goal of imparting a certain civic-mindedness and moral code to the new Soviet citizenry. *The Soviet Alphabet* was written by Mayakovsky as a morale booster for Red Army soldiers and was distributed to those boarding trains for the Front. Though often misidentified as a children's book, this parody of an old pornographic alphabet uses language and situations better suited to the trenches than to the nursery.

J. A.

BOOKS FOR CHILDREN

1917–31

One of the lesser-known cultural by-products of the October Revolution of 1917 was a renaissance in children's books. Prior to that, schooling in Russia was not mandatory, those schools that did exist had inadequate and obsolete classrooms and curricula, and many children were taught at home. In fact, half the population (adults and children alike) was illiterate. In the post-revolutionary period, education became a priority. Modern schools were constructed, and pre- and elementary-school facilities were integrated into factory complexes, their schedules corresponding to the shifts of the workers, many of whom were now women.

It was decreed at this time that children's books would no longer be based on the usual fairy tales and nursery rhymes. The objective of this new literature would be to portray more real-life scenarios intended to reflect the transformations of society and instruct its young audience in the activities, inventions, and values of Soviet reality. It was meant to produce creative and responsible young citizens and, to this end, the content and images were rigorously supervised by a government agency.

Many of these illustrated books were created by major writers and artists of the period. These slight volumes, designed to shape the juvenile conscience through a nuanced formulation of ideas by the most accomplished literary minds, were enhanced by visual concepts and motifs invented by artists of the avant-garde. Indeed, the interlacing of words and images seen in these collaborations of poets and painters is often reminiscent of earlier Futurist books. Their brightly colored and stylized silhouettes crisply printed on good paper, sometimes echoing ROSTA (or agit-prop) poster art, were articulated by a dynamic layout and accompanied a playful typography specially conceived to fire the child's imagination. As El Lissitzky would state in 1926/27: "By reading, our children are already acquiring a new plastic language; they are growing up with a different relationship to the world and to space, to shape and to colour." Even Lissitzky's Yiddish books for children, despite their more traditional settings and stories, show a graphic invention that breaks with earlier conventions (pp. 174–76).

Prior to the Stalinist period, that is, before 1927, children's books carried a subtle, as opposed to a literal, ideological message. They explored the beauties of Russian flora and fauna, the excitement of electrification, industrialization, or mechanized travel, and the appeal of practical or leisure activities. Other books implicitly emphasized the values of human effort, cooperation, and participation in collective life. Still others contained more exotic references as a means of broadening the young readers' horizons. The importance of this sector of Soviet cultural renewal is confirmed by the size of the editions. In comparison to adult books of the early 1920s, usually published in 1,500 to 3,000 copies, children's books of the mid-1920s were produced in editions of 10,000 to 15,000 copies. In 1926 Samuil Marshak's and Vladimir Lebedev's book *Luggage* (p. 179) was printed in 30,000 copies and, by 1934, the average print-run of a children's book numbered 100,000 copies.

M. R.

CONSTRUCTIVIST GRAPHIC DESIGN

1918–31

In 1928 Aleksei Gan, one of the major theorists of Constructivism, proposed a basic definition of Constructivist graphics as applied to books and agitational literature. In this document, he stated that Constructivist design was based on a methodology conceived in relation to an aesthetic and utilitarian program. More explicitly, he defined the prime objectives of the Constructivist project as an emphasis on economical and mechanical production techniques, a standardized artistic language, ideologically driven social and political imperatives, and an appeal to a mass audience. Figurative incident, individual expression, symbolism, and academic formal traditions were banned from the new artistic canon. This program, combined with a systematic pedagogy, was taught in the post-revolutionary art institutions where most of the major avant-garde artists were instructors: the INKhUK (for theory) and the VKhUTEMAS (for practical application). The guiding principle—to rationally order visual material—corresponded to a much broader political objective, that of controlling all aspects of Soviet life.

Despite the new definition of art and the artist as instruments in the service of the State, and notwithstanding the firm goals that art should be anonymous and address the collective conscience, the examples of Constructivist graphic design assembled here show a broad diversity of individual approaches and styles. The first books in this section may be considered proto-Constructivist, and include handmade as well as mechanical elements. Notable among them is the $5 \times 5 = 25$ catalogue (pp. 184, 185) for an exhibition of 1921 that was a watershed in its proclamation of the death of painting. Two years later a pure Constructivist graphic style emerged in which crisply drawn letters, bright and contrasting colors, and a dynamic yet balanced layout were the chosen means for achieving maximum clarity, serving mass production, reflecting content, and appealing to a proletarian audience.

Aleksandr Rodchenko and El Lissitzky were the major representatives of the Constructivist aesthetic as represented here. Coming from different origins and with dissimilar trainings and perspectives, each created from the basic vocabulary of Constructivism an extraordinarily original, eloquent, and personal style. Rodchenko's book covers exemplify the tenets of pure Constructivist design and manifest the artist's genius in working within a Soviet system that sorely lacked advanced production methods and often necessitated an execution by hand. Lissitzky, on the contrary, created many of his book covers in Berlin, where he had access to a broader range of international models and more sophisticated printing techniques.

These two figures should not, however, overshadow the contributions of other artists presented here in which the basic graphic premises are interpreted in original and sometimes less-orthodox designs. They illustrate the resources of each artist's imagination within the rigorous strictures of the Constructivist system. It is furthermore worth calling attention to the singular book covers by the Latvian-born Gustav Klutsis, whose sober motifs of dynamic floating constructions defy the ideology of abstraction and project a more explicitly utopian message (p. 204).

M. R.

PHOTOGRAPHY AND PHOTOMONTAGE

1923–33

Around 1923–24, just as the Constructivist graphic mode was being put into circulation, that same aesthetic was challenged as being too esoteric for a proletarian audience. Whereas these abstract graphics had a powerful visual impact, it was through words (lettering and typography) that meaning was conveyed. On the other hand, photography could propose similar messages through immediately familiar images, even to an illiterate public. It was therefore proclaimed that the more “factual” medium of photography would better serve the Soviet cause.

Throughout Europe in the 1920s, photography and photomontage were privileged experimental mediums. Yet a comparison of the Soviet implementation of these techniques to contemporaneous experiments at the Bauhaus in Germany, for example, shows two distinct perspectives. Whereas the first was intended to serve an ideological purpose, the objective of the second was to create a formal vocabulary of modernism. Notwithstanding these considerations, early Soviet photomontage was not explicitly political. Its goal was to be factual and accessible. Generally narrative and populist in form and subject matter, it was also visually dense, often combining colored graphics with photographs in order to reinforce dramatic impact and convey content.

Most of the Soviet artists who turned to photomontage were either familiar with or actively involved in the cinematographic industry, nationalized in 1919, as a perfect vehicle for mass communication. Aleksandr Rodchenko, in particular, worked with Dziga Vertov and Sergei Eisenstein, both of whom radically transformed the cinematographic experience in the early to mid-1920s. These film directors’ exploitation of the montage technique—the combining of frames of film in a creative order with the goal of achieving a reality that was more powerful than that of the raw material—produced the signature style of early Soviet cinema. Within this process, they used eccentric cuts and dissolves, and were sensitive to rhythmic patterns and (in the case of Eisenstein) to the free association of images.

Rodchenko designed film titles for the screen for Vertov’s newsreels and documentaries, and montaged posters for the films of both men. His posters for Vertov in particular combine close-up shots in different scales and perspectives with a strong graphic element, a formula that carried over into his (and many of his colleagues’) book cover designs. Indeed, many of Rodchenko’s early photomontaged book covers appear as montaged cinematic narratives. In somewhat later works, dramatic lighting effects and spliced perspectives and silhouettes bear witness again to a cinematographic inspiration.

Rodchenko achieved most of his effects through the medium of collage, or a cutting and pasting of his fragmented shots. Lissitzky, on the contrary, was more interested in photography as a dark-room technique. His manipulation of negatives and photogram processes corresponded to the more sophisticated inventions and models he had learned or seen abroad. Immaterial and timeless, his images show a technical subtlety and complexity that has yet to be completely understood. Curiously, the Stenberg brothers’ integration of photomontage was often a simulation, imitating the grisaille effects of photographic material through handmade brushwork (p. 218).

M. R.

ARCHITECTURE AND INDUSTRY

1926–33

The “reconstruction” of the Soviet Union was a key theme in the post-revolutionary period. Prior to 1917 Russia lagged far behind the West in terms of modernization and industrialization, and much urban and domestic architecture was inspired by the glories of an imperial past or else by provincial rural traditions. After the revolution, what more appropriate utopian symbol could be devised than that of modern city complexes rising from the ruins of a crumbled empire?

Communal housing, schools, libraries, palaces of culture, and workers' clubs would transform individual existence into a collective, communal life. Huge government office buildings commissioned from major architects would symbolize the strong leadership and ideology of the new Soviet regime. This deliberate break with the past and push to progress produced some of the most forward-looking architectural projects in the twentieth century. Unfortunately, due to later events, the names of architects such as Moisei Ginsburg, Nikolai Ladovsky, the Vesnin brothers, Konstantin Melnikov, Ivan Leonidov, Iakov Chernikhov, and Ilja Golosov, to mention only these, are less familiar in the West than they should be. Their visionary concepts produced in the 1920s and 1930s are unequaled elsewhere in the world.

Whereas a majority of these ambitious projects were never realized, fortunately they were documented in the architectural periodicals and books published at the time. Noteworthy among these was *CA (Contemporary Architecture)* (1926–30; pp. 223–25), the principal organ of the Union of Contemporary Architects, founded in Moscow in 1925. One of the most impressive architectural journals anywhere during that period, it contained illustrated reports on architecture in the West (by Walter Gropius, Le Corbusier, Erich Mendelsohn, and Frank Lloyd Wright, for example) as well as in the Soviet provinces, historical studies and theoretical discussions, and drawings and photographs of radically innovative urban designs.

CA and the contemporaneous *Building Moscow* (1924–41; p. 226) provide a rich repertory of Soviet models that continue to inspire architects to this day. Furthermore, their dynamic layout and design, consigned to the best graphic artists of the period (Aleksei Gan, Aleksandr Rodchenko, Gustav Klutssis, the Stenberg brothers, Solomon Telingater, and El Lissitzky among them), not only translate the excitement of this phase of radical aesthetic and social renewal, but bear witness to the interdisciplinary nature of the artistic community. These publications communicated Soviet architecture's ideals and concepts to the vast population of the Soviet Union as well as to an international community. Indeed, during these decades, architectural associations, symposia, and publications created an open forum for international exchange.

Other vehicles for disseminating Soviet industrial progress were the publications—catalogues for trade fairs, books, manifestoes, and reports—devoted to industrial and cultural production in the USSR. Despite a content that was far from seductive, these volumes show a remarkable graphic invention, sometimes imaginatively inspired by that very content, and designed for popular appeal. Lissitzky's and Telingater's catalogue for the All-Union Printing Trades Exhibition of 1927, with its full-page horizontal tab index, is one of the more well-known examples of such visual and practical ingenuity (p. 228). M. R.

PHOTOGRAPHY IN THE SERVICE OF PROPAGANDA

1924–34

Photography and photomontage gained widespread notoriety in the 1920s, with the prime objective of popularizing culture. Slightly later in the decade, there emerged what one might call a hard-line agitational photomontage, conceived specifically for propaganda purposes. According to the medium's initial theorist, Gustav Klutssis, this reformed visual language was representative of a "new art of the masses," and embodied the true Soviet spirit and style. It emerged independently from the formalist tendencies of "advertising photomontage" (Klutssis's words) prevalent in the West. The repertory of images of this agitational style would draw on and glorify significant historical and social events, and industrial and economic manifestations of progress in the Soviet Union, as opposed to the cultural phenomena and literary heroes found in the medium in the earlier years.

These silhouetted, cropped, and assembled black-and-white images combined with bold, colored (predominantly red and black) graphics carry an aggressive message of collective purpose and economic prosperity. In vivid displays, art is called to the service of propaganda, and the factual truths of the original documentary photographs reorganized and manipulated in order to express the new truths of the Communist cause.

Klutssis, Aleksandr Rodchenko, and Varvara Stepanova, each in a different spirit, turned their energies to this politicized orientation of photomontage with enthusiasm and dedication. Klutssis's photomontages from this period are compositionally and graphically complex, whereas Rodchenko and Stepanova concentrated on perspectival and framing devices, close-up shots, and serial repetition to induce the photograph to speak a language for the masses by itself.

El Lissitzky, who had originally shunned documentary photography, radically changed his perspective sometime after his return to the Soviet Union from abroad in 1925. His new perception of photography in terms of factual content and a social and political function is evident in his designs for commercial and industrial trade fairs and their accompanying catalogues, which became his major activity after 1926. Lissitzky's installation for the Soviet pavilion at the International Press Exhibition in Cologne in 1928 is exemplary of his new direction, consisting of a monumental "photo-frieze" (78 feet long by 11½ feet high) narrating the history and achievements of the Soviet press. The relatively conventional assemblage of "factual" photographs illustrating the theme "The Task of the Press is the Education of the Masses" confirms his disavowal of his earlier, more experimental approach. The impact of the Cologne "photo-frieze" was nonetheless overwhelming, and has been compared to a hypnotic cinematic experience. Lissitzky's catalogue and its fold-out images (p. 240) echo the installation in miniature, a "typographic kino show," as he liked to call it.

Aggressive and unequivocal as to its message, this form of staged or slanted photojournalism would enjoy a long career in the years to come. It would be injected into everyday life through huge photograph panels lining the streets. It would also be recast with deliberately dramatic cinematic effects in the pages of illustrated periodicals such as *USSR in Construction* (1930-49; pp. 242, 243) put to the service of the painful realities of the Stalinist regime.

M. R.

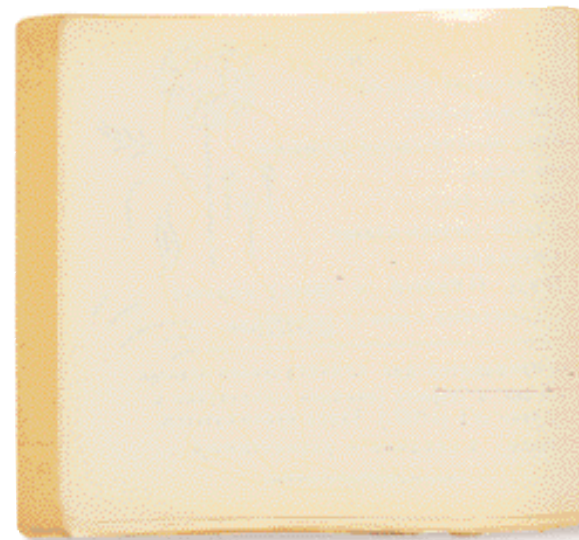
NON-OFFICIAL PUBLICATIONS

1928–33

In the Stalinist period, beginning in 1928, avant-garde artists faced increasing pressure to devote their talents to the depiction of proletarian reality in the service of Socialist concerns. Poets penned odes to steel production and oil refineries, and artists competed for State commissions to design albums commemorating industrial achievements, Red Army anniversaries, and other Soviet victories. An exception to this general rule was the poet and artist Aleksei Kruchenykh, who maintained his lifelong commitment to creative freedom. In a move that recalled his first forays into publishing and early lithographed books, Kruchenykh returned to self-publishing and to the use of non-mechanical printing processes, producing books with manuscript text by *steklopechat* (glass printing), a lithography-like process, to produce edition sizes of up to 150 copies. As an editor and compiler, Kruchenykh published, among other projects, the monumental *Unpublished Khlebnikov* comprised of twenty-four volumes of previously unpublished works and variants of published works found in Khlebnikov's personal notebooks after his death. Each was written in longhand by various artists and authors and featured new or previously published illustrations. Although Kruchenykh lived until 1968, he published his last two books of poetry—*The Ironyad* and *The Rubiniad*—in 1930. Later, he compiled albums, bibliographies, and archival accounts to preserve the legacy of himself, his contemporaries, and Russian Futurism.

The first Soviet edition of the Finnish folk epic *Kalevala* (1933; p. 247), supervised by Pavel Filonov, is the only other contemporaneous work that can be said to have perpetuated the aesthetic theories of the Futurist avant-garde. A collective work by Filonov's students, under his direction, *Kalevala* openly defies the strict demands of Socialist Realism in its fusion of non-objective imagery with figurative, recognizable subject matter.

J. A.



Right:
KIRILL ZDANEVICH. *The Unpublished Khlebnikov* (series), no. 13, by Velimir Khlebnikov. Aleksei Kruchenykh, ed. 1929. Ed.: 130. Lithograph, 6¹⁵/₁₆ x 8¹¹/₁₆" (17.6 x 22 cm) [784]

Below:
KIRILL ZDANEVICH. *The Unpublished Khlebnikov: A Scratch among the Clouds* (series), no. 14, by Velimir Khlebnikov. Aleksei Kruchenykh, ed. 1930. Ed.: 130. Lithograph, 6¹⁵/₁₆ x 8¹¹/₁₆" (17 x 20.5 cm) [784]

