

MODERN ART AND IDEAS 4 1914–1928

A Guide for Educators

Department of Education at The Museum of Modern Art

EARLY ABSTRACTION

Artists included in this guide:
Marcel Breuer, Vasily Kandinsky, Gustav Klucis, El Lissitzky, Kazimir Malevich, László Moholy-Nagy, Piet Mondrian, Gerrit Rietveld, Aleksandr Rodchenko, Oskar Schlemmer, and Vladimir Tatlin.

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A NOTE TO EDUCATORS

This is the fourth volume in the Modern Art and Ideas series, which explores the history of modern art through The Museum of Modern Art’s rich collection. Although traditional art historical categories are the series’ organizing principle, these parameters are used primarily as a means of exploring artistic developments and movements in conjunction with their social and historical context, with attention to the contributions of specific artists. This guide is informed by issues posed by the selected works in a variety of mediums (painting, sculpture, drawing, photography), but its organization and lesson topics are created with the school curriculum in mind, with particular application to social studies, visual art, history, and language arts. Lessons are accompanied by writing, research, and hands-on, art-based activities that encourage students to make connections between the visual arts and other disciplines.

The goal of this guide is to introduce students to early abstraction in modern Western art, and to demonstrate to teachers the variety of ways in which these works can be used in the classroom. The guide’s purpose is not just to explicate works of art but also to demonstrate how images and historical information can be integrated into numerous subject areas and skill bases taught in the classroom. The works featured in this guide span the years 1914 to 1928, when artistic movements such as Suprematism, Constructivism, de Stijl, and Bauhaus arose in response to World War I, the Russian Revolution, and the years that followed, pioneering new forms of nonobjective art. These radically modern movements revolutionized the traditional arts of painting and sculpture, as well as everyday life in the form of architecture and design. Students will be introduced to significant ideas in art and culture from this period. By comparing a variety of mediums and artistic styles, students will be able to practice observation, articulation, and discussion skills, and will further develop their visual literacy.

This series was devised with the understanding that the history of modern art is not simply a progression of hermetic styles; rather, a complex matrix of intellectual, social, and historical factors have contributed to the creation of art. Modern art is not solely the product of artists who seek to overthrow convention at all cost. As Kirk Varnedoe suggested, it “has been the product of individual decisions to reconsider the complex possibilities within the traditions available to them, and to act on basic options that were, and remain, broadly available and unconcealed.”¹ Indeed, a work of art may be viewed as a locus that invites numerous approaches and offers multiple ways of understanding the historical moment in which it was made as well as the individual who created it.

1. Kirk Varnedoe, *A Fine Disregard: What Makes Modern Art Modern* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1990), 22.

USING THE EDUCATORS GUIDE

The five lessons that comprise this guide—**New Visions of the World**, **Constructing Things**, **Ideal Living**, **Ideal Objects**, and **Ideal Performance**—may be used sequentially or as independent units. The lessons include an introduction to key principles followed by a close examination of each work, including the work’s historical context and information on the architect or artist. Discussion questions based on the image lead students through formal analysis of the artwork, and seek to create connections between information and visual evidence. The activities that conclude each lesson encourage students to synthesize what they have learned about the works, and connect the lesson to the broader curriculum or relate it to skills students are practicing in the classroom.

IMAGES

All of the questions, discussions, and activities in this guide are based on images on the accompanying CD-ROM. Please examine the images carefully before showing them to your students. Your classroom should be equipped with a computer and LCD projector. You may also print images from the CD-ROM to transparency paper for overhead projection.

ACTIVITIES

The Activities sections encourage students to make connections between their own experiences and the concepts presented in the lessons. Through these activities, students will begin to develop a language for discussing and looking at art. Feel free to tailor the activities to the age level of your students.

RESEARCH PROJECTS

The materials in this guide provide opportunities for in-depth research on specific artists or artistic movements. We have suggested some topics, to which we encourage you to add your own.

FOR FURTHER CONSIDERATION AND SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY AND RESOURCES

Additional discussion questions and research projects are included in this section. A bibliography and resources section has also been provided for teachers and students to use in conducting research. The resources recommended in these pages provide further information on the artists and artworks in this guide, general historical topics, and additional classroom activities.

GLOSSARY

A glossary of art historical terms (bolded upon first mention in each lesson) is included at the end of the guide.

SETTING THE SCENE

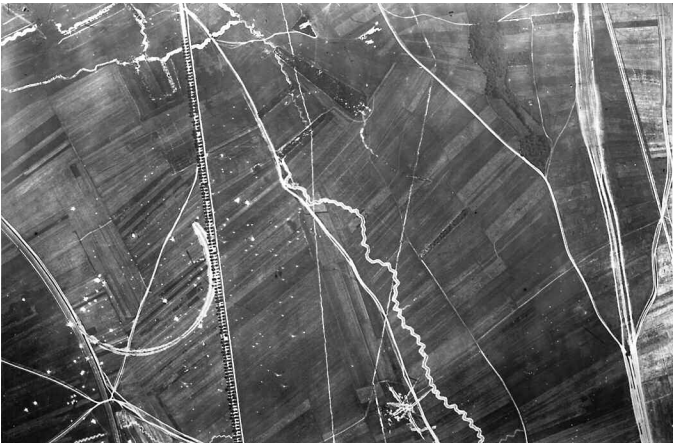


IMAGE ONE: Photographer Unknown. Untitled (aerial reconnaissance photograph, Lavannes World War I). 1917. Gelatin silver print 6 ½ x 8 ⅞" (16.5 x 22.5 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of Edward Steichen

SCIENTIFIC DISCOVERY: AIRPLANES TO EINSTEIN

By the turn of the twentieth century, inventions such as the motion picture, the automobile, electricity, the telephone, and the airplane had already had a profound impact on how artists perceived and represented the world.

- Ask your students to look at the aerial reconnaissance photograph (Image One). Ask them if they can identify any recognizable parts of the photograph. Ask them if the photograph reminds them of anything they have seen before. Inform your students that this photograph was taken from a military plane during World War I. Ask your students how this information affects the way that they see the photograph.
- Ask your students to reflect on the experience of looking out of the window of a moving car, train, bus, or airplane. Ask them to describe what the world looks like from the vantage point of these different types of transportation.
- Organize your students into small groups of two or more, and ask them to consider an everyday technological invention such as the radio, television, microwave, computer, CD player, digital camera, or iPod. Ask them to reflect on the object's function and how it affects their life.

LESSONS

LESSON ONE: New Visions of the World

Comparison I

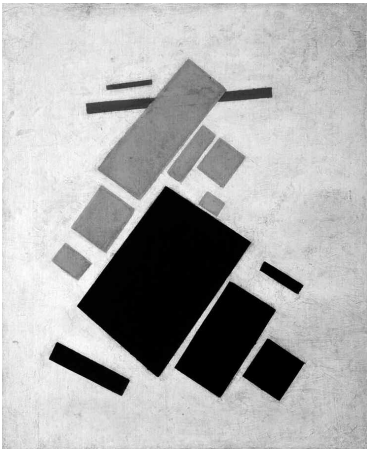


IMAGE TWO: Kazimir Malevich. Russian, born Ukraine. 1878–1935. *Suprematist Composition: Airplane Flying*. 1915 (dated on reverse 1914). Oil on canvas, 22 $\frac{7}{8}$ x 19" (58.1 x 48.3 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. 1935 acquisition confirmed in 1999 by agreement with the Estate of Kazimir Malevich and made possible with funds from the Mrs. John Hay Whitney Bequest (by exchange)

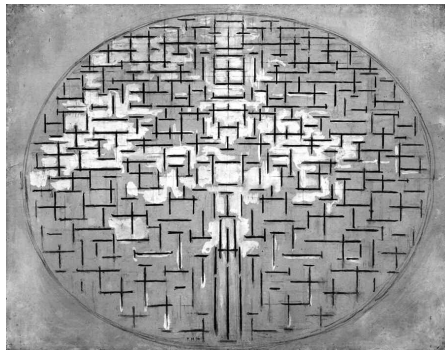


IMAGE THREE: Piet Mondrian. Dutch, 1872–1944. *Pier and Ocean (Sea and Starry Sky)*. 1915 (inscribed 1914). Charcoal and gouache on paper, 34 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 44" (87.9 x 111.2 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Mrs. Simon Guggenheim Fund. © 2006 Mondrian/Holtzman Trust, c/o hcr@hcrinternational.com

Comparison II

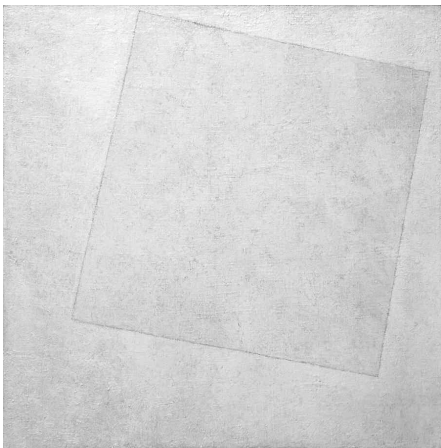


IMAGE FOUR: Kazimir Malevich. Russian, born Ukraine. 1878–1935. *Suprematist Composition: White on White*. 1918. Oil on canvas, 31 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 31 $\frac{1}{4}$ " (79.4 x 79.4 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. 1935 acquisition confirmed in 1999 by agreement with the Estate of Kazimir Malevich and made possible with funds from the Mrs. John Hay Whitney Bequest (by exchange)

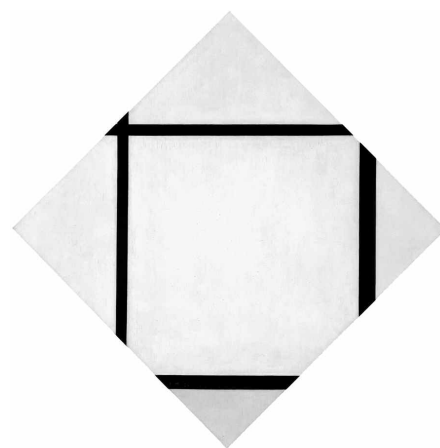


IMAGE FIVE: Piet Mondrian. Dutch, 1872–1944. *Tableau I: Lozenge with Four Lines and Gray*. 1926. Oil on canvas, diagonal: 44 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 44" (113.7 x 111.8 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Katherine S. Dreier Bequest. © 2006 Mondrian Holtzman Trust, c/o hcr@hcrinternational.com

INTRODUCTION

During an exceptionally charged moment in European history, two artists, Kazimir Malevich and Piet Mondrian, began exploring an entirely new form of painting. In 1914, World War I broke out in Europe, followed, in 1917, by the overthrow of Russia's Romanov dynasty and the October Revolution. A curtain of war was drawn across Europe. Paris, which had been the epicenter of avant-garde art, was suddenly inaccessible to many artists. Independently of one another, Malevich and Mondrian had already begun to feel that **Cubism** and **Futurism**, the leading artistic movements of the time, were too confining, given what the artists wished to communicate. Living in Russia and Holland, respectively, they developed two distinct methods of nonfigurative painting. They were pioneers venturing into unknown territory; in fact, painting the unknown was in some respects very much what they were after.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

- Students will be introduced to two artists, Kazimir Malevich and Piet Mondrian, who pioneered different systems of abstract painting.
- By comparing Malevich and Mondrian, students will consider how the two artists' use of shape, line, composition, and color reflect both similarities and differences in their artistic ideologies.

INTRODUCTORY DISCUSSION

- Ask your class to come up with definitions of the word "modern." Ask them to consider what it might mean to be a "modern" artist.
- Invite your students to reflect on the kinds of choices (such as color, line, composition, subject matter, and scale) that an artist might make when creating a painting.
- Ask your students what makes two lines perpendicular. Ask them what makes two lines parallel. Have them define "quadrilateral," "rectangle," and "square."

IMAGE-BASED DISCUSSION

Begin by looking at Malevich's *Suprematist Composition: Airplane Flying* (Image Two). Refrain from telling your students the title right away.

- Have your students consider the kinds of artistic choices Malevich made. Ask them to describe the various shapes in the painting.
- Ask your students to consider how the shapes relate to one another in the composition: Are they perpendicular, diagonal, layered, or separated? How much space exists between the shapes? Do the shapes seem to be pulling together or pushing apart?
- Invite your students to describe the colors Malevich used in the painting.

Introduce the title of the painting to your students.

- Ask your students to describe what it feels like to fly in an airplane. Ask them how they might connect an airplane in flight with what is represented in the painting.
- Ask your students to describe what it is like to look out of an airplane window, based on their experience of flying or seeing aerial photographs or film.

Are there any other ways in which the painting reminds your students of flying in an airplane? Some students may feel that the painting is reminiscent of a landscape seen from above. Others may see elements of a propeller plane in the composition.

- Ask your students to summarize the artistic choices Malevich made in *Suprematist Composition: Airplane Flying*.

When Malevich painted *Suprematist Composition: Airplane Flying*, he was familiar with the leading artistic movements of the time. He had most recently been involved with Russian Futurism, a movement fascinated by the dynamism of trains, planes, automobiles, moving pictures, electricity, and other accomplishments of the machine age. The Futurists captured the speed and dynamism of modern life through fragmented forms and stippled brushwork.

Malevich refers to Futurist impulses in the second part of the painting's title, "Airplane Flying," but his choice of color and composition and his lack of a recognizable subject mark a significant break with past styles. Malevich reduced his palette to primary colors alongside black and white. He developed a sense of movement not through brushstrokes but through the tension created by the proximity and irregularity of his flat shapes, placed on a diagonal axis rather than along a vertical or horizontal one. Malevich called his new language of painting "Suprematism."

Malevich presented *Suprematist Composition: Airplane Flying* in his 1915 exhibition *The Last Futurist Exhibition*, in St. Petersburg. He published a pamphlet to accompany the exhibition, a practice that would become critical for Malevich, as his radical painting style inspired confusion and sometimes even outrage. Malevich wrote, "Color and texture in painting are ends in themselves. They are the essence of painting, but this essence has always been destroyed by the subject[. . .] Painters should abandon subject and objects if they wish to be pure painters. . . ." Malevich also commented on realism, writing that "The new realism in [Suprematist] painting is very much realism in painting, for it contains no realism of mountains, sky, water. . . ." He closed with a dramatic call to arms: "We, Suprematists, throw open the way to you. Hurry!—For tomorrow you will not recognize us."²

- Ask your students to summarize some of the central points Malevich made in the above statement. What did the artist think painting had to abandon in order for it to be truly modern? How did he want to change painting?
- Ask your students to reflect on the word "realism." In his statement, Malevich referred to traditional artistic tools of illusion (such as the use of perspective and naturalistic colors, and the shading and modeling of forms), which create recognizable images of landscapes, people, and objects. Ask your students to consider why Malevich thought that flat, geometric forms were more "real" than traditional realism.

2. Kazimir Malevich, in "From Cubism and Futurism to Suprematism: The New Realism in Painting" (1916), *Art in Theory, 1900–2000: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*. Charles Harrison and Paul Wood, eds. (Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers, 2003), 173–83.

- Now ask your students to look closely at Mondrian's *Pier and Ocean (Sea and Starry Sky)* (Image Three). Refrain from telling them the title right away. What kinds of artistic choices did Mondrian make? What types of lines and shapes can be seen, and what colors? Ask your students to compare Mondrian's choices with Malevich's. Ask what similarities and differences they see in the composition and use of line. Introduce the title of the painting to your students. Ask them how the title might relate to their observations.

Mondrian's title for this drawing, *Pier and Ocean (Sea and Starry Sky)*, implies a landscape. It is not hard to imagine how the flat landscape of his native Holland, where sea, sky, and land meet so seamlessly, might have inspired him. But he would soon abandon the use of such descriptive titles, choosing instead (as Malevich did) to use the term "composition." In 1914 Mondrian returned to Holland from Paris, where he had been living, in order to care for his sick father. While in Paris, Mondrian had befriended such artists as Diego Rivera and Fernand Léger, who shared a common interest in new forms of art, including Cubism. Unable to return to Paris because of the start of World War I, Mondrian stayed in Holland and continued to explore a new way of drawing and painting.

Pier and Ocean (Sea and Starry Sky), a work in what is referred to as the "Plus and Minus" series, features the artist's early experimentation with vertical and horizontal intersections. Mondrian thought of lines drawn on a vertical axis as "male," and horizontal lines as "female." He saw this perpendicular relationship of the Cartesian x- and y-axes as being essential to nature, as revealed in the intersection of trees and land. This element of Mondrian's work is quite distinct from Malevich's tilted view of the world. But like Malevich, Mondrian had begun to abandon the subject in favor of what he called "pure," "true" forms. These similarities and differences between the two artists are explored further in the next pairing, Comparison II.

- Ask your students to look at Malevich's *Suprematist Composition: White on White* (Image Four). Refrain from telling them the title of the work. Your students may feel challenged by this painting and ask questions such as "Is this art?" or "How much does this cost?" Let them know that these sorts of questions reflect the radical nature of the painting. What other kinds of questions does the painting inspire? What questions does *White on White* raise about Malevich? What questions does the painting pose about the role of the viewer? Ask your students what they see in the painting that inspires these kinds of questions.
- Ask your students to clearly describe the painting's shapes and composition. If the inner quadrilateral were placed in the very center of the painting, would it change the way that they see the work? What colors did Malevich use in the painting?
- Introduce the title to your students. Ask them to recall some of the principles about Suprematism they discovered when looking at Malevich's earlier work, *Suprematist Composition: Airplane Flying*. What similarities and differences do they see between the two works?

With *Suprematist Composition: White on White*, painted three years after *Suprematist Composition: Airplane Flying*, Malevich relinquished concrete titles in favour of abstract ones. The diagonal orientation of the form remained, but the primary colors and the black disappeared. Instead, Malevich began to look at white as the ultimate color (white light embodies the full color spectrum). The work's accompanying explanation elevated painting to an astrophysical level:

I have ripped through the blue lampshade of the constraints of colour. I have come out into the white. Follow me, comrade aviators. Swim into the abyss. I have set up the semaphores of Suprematism.³

Malevich was deeply interested in space-time physics and the notion of the fourth dimension, ideas that had been introduced in the 1880s. With *White on White*, Malevich was not only trying to record the disorienting modern experience, he seemed to be reaching for the stars as well. As fellow Russian artist El Lissitzky noted, “We have made the canvas rotate. And as we rotated it, we saw that we were putting ourselves in space.”⁴

- For the following exercise, your students will need a piece of paper and a pencil or pen. Ask your students to look at Mondrian’s *Tableau I: Lozenge with Four Lines and Gray* (Image Five). Ask them to draw a square (preferably using a straight edge) in the middle of their piece of blank paper. Ask them to rotate the paper so that the square is oriented in the same diamond shape as Mondrian’s canvas. Ask them to duplicate the lines that they see in *Tableau I: Lozenge with Four Lines and Gray* on their own “canvas.” Ask them to imagine that the lines extend beyond the canvas. It is now their turn to make artistic choices. Based on what they see, ask them to extend the lines to fill the entire piece of paper.
- Ask your students to reflect on the exercise. What kinds of choices did they make when extending the lines, and why?
- Ask your students to compare *Tableau I: Lozenge with Four Lines and Gray* with Malevich’s *Suprematist Composition: White on White*. Ask them what similarities and differences they see.

Painted more than twelve years after *Pier and Ocean (Sea and Starry Sky)*, *Tableau I: Lozenge with Four Lines and Gray* is a rigorous exploration of the relationship between perpendicular lines. During the years between these two works, Mondrian became associated with a Dutch group known as *de Stijl* (“the style”). Both Mondrian and the group’s founder, Theo van Doesburg, believed that by using primary colors, rectangular shapes, and asymmetrical lines, their compositions could be understood by anyone, regardless of nationality or education. The artists associated with *de Stijl* were idealists and hoped to create a universally relevant art. But a major point of departure between Mondrian and Doesburg occurred in the 1920s, when the latter moved away from employing the perpendicular axis in art and design in favor of a diagonal axis. It is no accident, therefore, that Mondrian turned the canvas of *Lozenge with Four Lines and Gray* on an angle. This very minimal, monochromatic work (much of Mondrian’s work is famous for its bright primary colors) emphasizes the dominance and central role of the horizontal and vertical lines over diagonal ones.

Mondrian continued to exhaust the compositional possibilities of perpendicular lines and primary colors for another twenty years. By 1917, he had already set his future course:

For the present at least I shall restrict my work to the ordinary world of the senses, since that is the one in which we still live. Still, art can already provide a transition to the finer regions, which I call the spiritual realm, perhaps erroneously; for I have read whatever has form is not yet spiritual. It is nonetheless the path of ascension: away from the material.⁵

3. Malevich, in “Non-Objective Art and Suprematism” (1919), *Art in Theory*, 293.

4. Varnedoe, *A Fine Disregard*, 267.

5. Harry Holtzman and James Martin, eds. and trans. *The New Art, the New Life: The Collected Writings of Piet Mondrian* (Boston: G. K. Hall & Company, 1986), 14.

ACTIVITIES

1. Composing Compositions

Mondrian used masking tape to create the straight-edged lines of his paintings. He also used the walls of his house and studio as experimental spaces where he could compose shapes and lines in preparation for his paintings.

Using the walls (and floors, if you wish) of your school hallway or classroom, assign your students the task of creating compositions using colored (or black) masking tape and colored construction paper. Your students should work in small groups or with partners. You may want to divide the class up into “color composition” and “line composition” teams, so that half of the students are responsible for the line composition and the other half coordinate the color composition.

2. Envisioning Space

Malevich was influenced by the writings of Charles Howard Hinton, who popularized his ideas about the fourth dimension in a series of essays at the turn of the twentieth century. Edwin A. Abbott, a contemporary of Hinton, was also interested in the notion of an unseen fourth dimension, and in 1884 he published a popular tale called *Flatland: A Romance of Many Dimensions*. The story describes a square (a “Flatlander”) living in a two-dimensional world, unable to comprehend the notion of a third dimension. Abbott used the following example to illustrate our own limitations in envisioning space of a higher dimension:

Does this [notion of a fourth dimension] still seem strange to you? Then put yourself in a similar position. Suppose a person of the Fourth Dimension, condescending to visit you, were to say, “Whenever you open your eyes, you see a Plane (which is of Two Dimensions) and you infer a Solid (which is of Three); but in reality you also see (though you do not recognize) a Fourth Dimension, which is not color nor brightness nor anything of the kind, but a true Dimension, although I cannot point out to you its direction, nor can you possibly measure it.” What would you say to such a visitor? Would not you have him locked up?⁶

- Assign your students to read and report on the central ideas of *Flatland: A Romance of Many Dimensions*.
- Ask your students to write about what they imagine life would be like in two dimensions. What would the world look like?

6. Edwin A. Abbott. *Flatland: A Romance of Many Dimensions* (New York: Penguin Books, 1998), 2–3.

LESSON TWO: Constructing Things

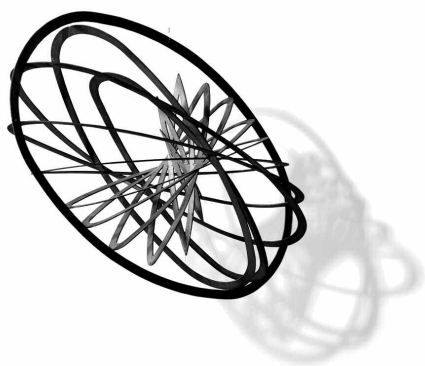


IMAGE SIX: Aleksandr Rodchenko. Russian, 1891–1956. *Spatial Construction no. 12*. c. 1920. Plywood, open construction partially painted with aluminum paint, and wire, 24 x 33 x 18 ½" (61 x 83.7 x 47 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Acquisition made possible through the extraordinary efforts of George and Zinaida Costakis, and through the Nate B. and Frances Spingold, Matthew H. and Erna Futter, and Enid A. Haupt Funds. © 2006 Aleksandr Rodchenko



IMAGE SEVEN: László Moholy-Nagy. American, born Hungary. 1895–1946. *Nickel Construction*. 1921. Nickel-plated iron, welded, 14 ¼ x 6 ¾ x 9 ¾" (35.9 x 17.5 x 23.8 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of Mrs. Sibyl Moholy-Nagy. © 2006 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn



IMAGE EIGHT: Vladimir Tatlin. Russian, 1885–1953. *Monument to the Third International* by Nikolai Punin. 1920. Illustrated book with one letterpress illustration on front cover, page: 11 x 8 ¾" (28 x 21.9 cm). Publisher: Izo NKP, Petersburg. Edition: unknown. The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of The Judith Rothschild Foundation, 2001. © 2006 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

INTRODUCTION

The years 1917 to 1922 brought both civil turmoil and possibility to Russia. Artists believed that their modernist, iconoclastic approach to art would help to create a new language for the free, Communist state. The artists discussed in this lesson, Aleksandr Rodchenko, László Moholy-Nagy, and Vladimir Tatlin, were all concerned with redefining art's engagement with life. **Constructivism**, as their movement came to be called, sought to apply aesthetic ideals to everyday material experience. These artists, along with their colleagues, thought of themselves as collaborative scientists working toward the creation of a new visual vocabulary based on their experiments with new forms and materials (they even called their art-making efforts "laboratory work"). Their artwork challenged traditional notions of form by relinquishing references to the figure and experimenting with materials. As Rodchenko later reflected on this exciting, idealistic moment in history, "We were for the new man; we felt him but did not imagine him clearly. . . . We created a new understanding of beauty, and enlarged the concept of art."⁷

LESSON OBJECTIVES

- Students will be introduced to artists who developed new visual forms through experimentation.
- Students will consider artists' choices of material.
- Students will be introduced to the term "Constructivism."

INTRODUCTORY DISCUSSION

- Ask your students to think about the kinds of choices an artist might make when creating a sculpture.
- Invite your students to discuss some differences between viewing a painting and a sculpture.
- The artists discussed in this lesson experimented with new forms and materials. Ask your students to consider what makes an experiment effective. Reflecting on their own experience in science labs at school, what are some of the components of conducting an experiment (such as a control, specified substances, specified quantities, et cetera)?

IMAGE-BASED DISCUSSION

Begin by looking at Rodchenko's *Spatial Construction no. 12* (Image Six). Refrain from telling your students the title right away.

- Ask each student to come up with a word that they might associate with this object. Note what types of words students volunteer. Are the word choices similar? Do they differ?
- Ask your students what they notice about the shapes that make up this object. How do they think the object was constructed?
- This work hangs from the ceiling. Ask your students to imagine what it would be like to walk under and around it. Would different viewpoints change how it looks? Based on your students' initial word associations, along with their visual analysis, does the work remind them of any other object?
- Introduce the title of the work to your students. Ask them if the title seems appropriate. Ask them why or why not.

7. Magdalena Dabrowski, in *Aleksandr Rodchenko*. Dabrowski et al. (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1998), 23–4.

In 1920, in a move away from the confines of painting, Rodchenko embarked upon a series of three-dimensional studies that he titled *Light Reflecting Constructions*. “Construction,” noted Rodchenko, “may be defined as the system by which an object is assembled from appropriately used materials.”⁸ These constructions were made to be folded in two dimensions or suspended from the ceiling in three dimensions. The constructions were basic geometric shapes: an oval, a circle, a triangle, a square, a hexagon, and an octagon. The oval (Image Six) is the only surviving work from the series. Rodchenko painted parts of these constructions with aluminum paint, so that the suspended shapes would reflect light and cast shadows. Rodchenko’s studied approach to material and shapes in this series reveals his interest in the scientific and mathematical research of the time.

- Ask your students to look at Moholy-Nagy’s *Nickel Construction* (Image Seven). Ask them to describe in detail what they see. What shapes or elements can they describe? Ask them to compare this object to Rodchenko’s *Spatial Construction no. 12*. What similarities and differences can they find between the two artists’ methods of construction?
- In-class writing exercise (students may choose one of the following topics):
 1. Ask your students to imagine that they are archeologists who have discovered Moholy-Nagy’s *Nickel Construction* in a long-forgotten warehouse filled with various objects from the twentieth century. Ask them to write down their ideas about why this object might have been created. Who might have used the object? Based on their analysis, what title would they give the object?
 2. Ask your students to imagine that they are inventors living in the twenty-second century. They have created this object for a futuristic purpose. What will it be used for? Who would use this object? What should it be called?

Moholy-Nagy’s *Nickel Construction* reveals the Hungarian artist’s interest in Russian Constructivist principles. In 1922, a large exhibition of Russian work took place in Berlin. This exhibition would have a great impact on other major artistic projects, such as the Dutch movement *de Stijl* (“the style”) and *Bauhaus*, a German art school and movement. In his first year as professor at the Bauhaus (then located in the German city Weimar), Moholy-Nagy established a Constructivist method of teaching centered on scientific and artistic experimentation with the structural capabilities of different materials such as glass, metal, rubber, paper, celluloid, cork, and wood.

- Ask your students to look at Tatlin’s *Monument to the Third International* (Image Eight). Let them know that the work is a print taken from a book. Ask them to look carefully at the image. Inform them that this is a proposal for a monument that was never built. Ask them to reflect on the purpose of monuments. How does the way a monument looks reflect its purpose? Ask your students to identify some important decisions Tatlin made in his design.
- Ask your students to compare *Monument to the Third International* with Rodchenko’s *Spatial Construction no. 12*. What similarities and differences do they see in the two constructions’ lines and forms?

Tatlin’s *Monument to the Third International* is symbolic of the aspirations of the Russian Constructivists and the young Soviet state. In 1918, the Soviet leader Vladimir Lenin launched his “Plan for Monumental Propaganda,” under which Tatlin was commissioned to create a project for a monument to the Revolution. The 1920 public unveiling of the model for the proposed tower caused a sensation.

8. Aleksandr Rodchenko, “The Line” (1921), in *Art into Life: Russian Constructivism, 1914–32* (New York: Rizzoli 1990). 73

In his architectural proposal, Tatlin captured an idealistic view of Russia's spiraling ascent in the world. As he stated at the unveiling, "It becomes possible to combine purely artistic forms with utilitarian goals."⁹ Comprised of glass and steel, the structure was intended to dwarf the Eiffel Tower of Paris in both height and dramatic effect. The enormous tower would straddle the Neva River in St. Petersburg, its tilting crown pointing to the North Star. Although the tower was never built it developed a cultlike following within the Soviet Union as well as in international circles.

After the unveiling of the proposal, Constructivists increasingly sought to apply their artistic efforts toward architecture, technology, and industry, as well as, inevitably, Soviet propaganda. In 1922, Constructivist Aleksei Gan would go so far as to declare, "Art is dead! There is no room for it in the human work apparatus. Work, technique and organization!"¹⁰

ACTIVITIES

1. Constructivist Laboratory

In the spirit of the Constructivist experimentation with basic materials and forms, students will create their own laboratory. Divide your students into groups, assigning each group a different material (or the entire class can work with one material). Materials can include newspapers, magazines, cardboard, wire, foam, sponges, and tinfoil. Each group should try to create a form that stands on its own and/or can be suspended from the ceiling. The students should be given just the necessary tools (such as masking tape, wire cutters, scissors, and string). Encourage your students to be creative in determining how to create strong structures (for example, newspaper rolled into tubes makes sturdy structural units).

2. Revolutionary Russia

Ask your students to research and create a timeline of the Russian Revolution of 1917. They should elaborate on key figures and moments. In creating the timeline, ask your students to employ some of the propagandistic techniques used by many of the Constructivist artists (such as Gustav Klucis, Lissitzky, and Rodchenko) including **photomontage**, collage (of both text and images), and trademark Soviet colors such as red, black, and white.

3. Discovering Russian Female Artists

Women played a major role in revolutionary Russia. Many of the most accomplished modern Russian artists were women, including Liubov Popova, Elena Semenova, and Varvara Stepanova (lifelong collaborator and wife of Rodchenko). Have your students research the artwork of some of these Russian artists on the Web.

9. Vladimir Tatlin, "The Work Ahead of Us" (1921)," in *Art into Life*, 100.

10. Aleksei Gan, "Constructivism" (1922), in *Art And Theory*, 344.

LESSON THREE: Ideal Living



IMAGE ELEVEN: Vasily Kandinsky. French, born Russia. 1866–1944. *Orange*. 1923. Lithograph, composition: 16 x 15 1/8" (40.6 x 38.3 cm); sheet: 19 x 17 1/8" (48.2 x 44.3 cm). Publisher and printer: Staatliches Bauhaus, Weimar. Edition: 50. The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Purchase 1949. © 2006 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York



IMAGE TWELVE: Marcel Breuer. American, born Hungary. 1902–1981. Attributed to Standard Möbel, Germany. Wassily Chair. 1927–28. Chrome-plated tubular steel and canvas, 28 1/4 x 30 3/4 x 28" (71.8 x 78.1 x 71.1 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of Herbert Bayer

INTRODUCTION

This lesson examines two artists, Vasily Kandinsky and Marcel Breuer, who were friends and faculty members of the international school and collaborative project known as the **Bauhaus**. The Bauhaus was established in the city of Weimar in 1919 on the following principles, outlined by its founder Walter Gropius, a German architect:

Architects, painters, sculptors, we must all return to crafts! [...]

Let us therefore create *a new guild of craftsmen* without the class-distinctions that raise an arrogant barrier between craftsmen and artists! Let us desire, conceive, and create the new building of the future together. It will combine architecture, sculpture, and painting *in a single form*, and will one day rise towards the heavens from the hands of a million workers as the crystalline symbol of a new and coming faith.¹¹

True to his word, Gropius created a school of workshops based on the model of the Bauhütten, homes built for stonemasons during the High Middle Ages. Central to the Bauhaus mission were artists' workshops, where students gained practical and hands-on skills in art, craft, and architectural and industrial design. The workshops produced prototypes for mass production, ranging from furniture to buildings. Founded during the bleak economy of post-World-War-I Germany, the Bauhaus represented the hope for a better Germany and a better world.

11. Walter Gropius, "Manifesto," (1919). The Bauhaus Archive / Museum of Design <http://www.bauhaus.de/english/bauhaus1919/manifest1919.htm>

LESSON OBJECTIVES

- Students will be introduced to the principles of the Bauhaus.
- Students will consider the elements of chair design.
- Students will be introduced to the printmaking technique of **lithography**.
- Students will consider how technological progress affects art and design.

INTRODUCTORY DISCUSSION

- Ask your students to name the parts of a chair (head, back, seat, arms, legs, feet). Ask why they think chairs share the same names as parts of the body. Have them think about the different types of chairs they use in their daily life (at school, at home, in restaurants, et cetera). How does the design of these chairs reflect their purpose? Based on the students' own experience or observation, how might someone's favorite chair reflect his or her personality?
- Ask your students to imagine how a print is made. Where do we find prints? Are there examples of prints in the classroom (such as in textbooks and on posters, hats, and t-shirts)?
- Web quest: Ask your students to explore MoMA's "What Is a Print?" Web site ([moma.org:http://www.moma.org/exhibitions/2001/whatisaprint/flash.html](http://www.moma.org/exhibitions/2001/whatisaprint/flash.html)). Ask them to report back on the different types of prints they learned about from this online activity.
- Debate: In 1936, the German philosopher and writer Walter Benjamin published a famous essay, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." Benjamin, like other thinkers of the time, was interested in exploring the profound impact modern mechanical reproduction (such as industrial design, photography, and film) had on the value and definition of art. Divide your students into two groups, "A" and "B." Group A should defend the idea that mechanically reproduced objects are art. Group B should take the opposite position, denying that mechanically reproduced forms can be considered art. Both teams should come up with a name for their "movement," and should cite evidence to support their arguments.

IMAGE-BASED DISCUSSION

Begin by looking at *Orange* (Image Eleven).

- Ask your students to name the shapes that Kandinsky used in this work.
- Ask your students to identify how many layers of shapes and colors are in the print. What might these layers reveal about the process?
- Ask your students to consider the composition of the print. How different would it look if Kandinsky had omitted the black checkerboard pattern in the upper left-hand corner? What if the large orange shape had not been included? Ask your students to imagine the print without the narrow triangle stretching diagonally from the lower left-hand corner to the upper right-hand one. How would this change the composition?

Kandinsky played a ubiquitous and colorful part in the story of modern art. Founder of the Blaue Reiter (Blue rider) group, Kandinsky shared his Russian compatriots' excitement and hope of the post-1917 October Revolution years, and returned home after an eighteen-year sojourn in Germany. He remained at the Bauhaus until Nazis closed the school, in 1933. *Orange* reflects both the artist's interest in abstract forms and color and the Bauhaus predilection for geometry. This change in the artist's work reflects both the Bauhaus aesthetic and the simplified geometric forms and graphic design generated by **Suprematism** and **Constructivism**, the leading Russian movements of the day.

The printmaking workshop at the Bauhaus embodied the school's ideals of collaboration and production. The workshop published master portfolios, developed iconic Bauhaus typography and poster design, and was actively used by the students. Kandinsky's *Orange* is included in one of the first Master Portfolios published by the Bauhaus. Like many modern artists, Kandinsky was partial to lithography because it was easy to manipulate and could produce large, colorful, uniform editions. Such print qualities were especially useful for organized groups like the Bauhaus, who publicized their artistic cause through printed magazines, pamphlets, and posters. (For more on Kandinsky, please refer to Lesson Three in the *Modern Art and Ideas 2: 1893–1913* educators guide.)

- **Ask your students to look at Breuer's Wassily Chair (Image Twelve). What do they notice about the chair's shape and lines? How would they describe the chair's overall form?**
- **Ask your students to try to identify the materials the artist used. How do they think the chair was made? Why do they think the artist made the design choices that he did?**
- **Ask your students what they think it might be like to sit in this chair. What parts of the chair would come into contact with the sitter's body?**
- **In-class writing exercise: Ask your students to imagine who might sit in this chair. Ask them to take a few minutes to write a monologue from the point of view of the sitter.**

The Hungarian-born architect and designer Breuer arrived at the Bauhaus in 1920. Drawn to the school's reputation for innovation, Breuer had abandoned his fine arts studies in Vienna and sold all of his belongings to finance his trip to Weimar. Although he would later become an internationally acclaimed architect, Breuer was initially apprenticed to the Bauhaus carpentry workshop. It was during this time that he began experimenting with furniture design.

As the legend goes, Breuer's flash of inspiration for the Wassily Chair occurred while he was riding his bicycle. He suddenly realized that the lightweight tubular steel of the bicycle's handlebars could be used in furniture construction. This revolutionary idea had an enormous impact on design, and within a year after the first Wassily prototype, many modern designers were using tubular steel. Breuer's experimentation with industrially produced materials also coincided with a shift in the Bauhaus away from handcrafted products and toward fulfilling the new motto coined by Gropius: "art and technology—a new unity." Breuer named the chair after his Bauhaus friend and mentor Kandinsky, who had immediately recognized the intelligence of the chair's design.

- Ask your students to compare Kandinsky's print and Breuer's chair. What shapes and lines do the two designs have in common? What differences do your students notice? How are both items forms of mechanical reproduction?
- Ask your students to reflect on the differences between working alone or in a group. What might be some of the advantages of the kind of collaborative creativity fostered by the Bauhaus?

ACTIVITIES

1. Design a Chair

Direct your students to develop a prototype for a chair. Ask them to consider how the design and materials of the chair might reflect the world today. Encourage them to be as creative as Breuer in thinking about how a material used for a different purpose could also be used in designing a chair.

Ask your students to sketch their chair (using line drawing and/or collage elements) and to write an explanatory paragraph of their design intentions.

2. An Invention of Accident

Lithography was invented accidentally by the Bavarian actor and playwright Alois Senefelder (1771–1834). Ask your students to investigate how and when Senefelder stumbled upon his discovery. Ask your students to research and write about another accidental invention (in any discipline).

3. The Beauty of the Bicycle

Few people realize that the bicycle is a relatively recent invention. Direct your students to investigate the origins of the bicycle and to research other artists who have been inspired by the bicycle (such as Henri Lartigue and Marcel Duchamp) on The Museum of Modern Art's Web site: www.moma.org.

4. The Weimar Republic

The "Weimar Republic" (as it is now referred to) was a brief but promising moment in Germany's history between the two world wars, named after the city of Weimar. Working in groups, have your students research different periods of the Weimar Republic, including the Republic's rise and its early years (1918–23); Stresemann's Golden Era (1923–29); and the rise of Hitler and subsequent fall of the Republic (1930–33).

LESSON FOUR: Ideal Objects

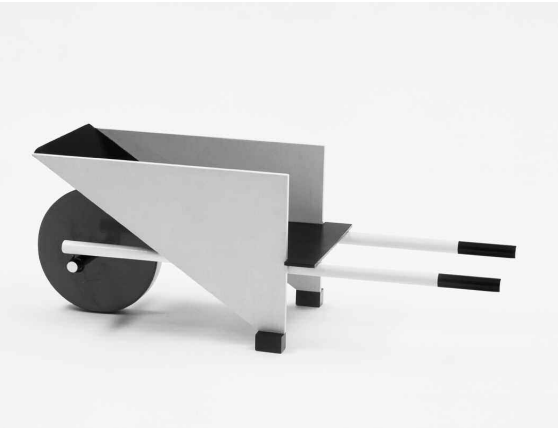


IMAGE NINE: Gerrit Rietveld. Dutch, 1888–1964. Child's Wheelbarrow. 1923. Painted wood, 12 ½ x 11 ¾ x 33 ½" (31.8 x 28.9 x 85.1 cm). Manufacturer: Gerard van de Groenekan. The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of Jo Carole and Ronald S. Lauder. © 2006 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / Beeldrecht, Amsterdam



IMAGE TEN: Gustav Klucis. Latvian, 1895–1944. Maquette for *Radio-Announcer*. 1922. Construction of painted cardboard, paper, wood, thread, and metal brads, 45 ¾ x 14 ½ x 14 ½" (106.1 x 36.8 x 36.8 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Sidney and Harriet Janis Collection Fund

INTRODUCTION

To make a comparison between a child's wheelbarrow and a propagandistic Soviet loud-speaker may at first seem incongruous. However, upon close inspection there are interesting connections to be drawn between the bold, simple shapes and colors employed by Gustav Klucis and Gerrit Rietveld, artists who were interested in applying modernist ideas and principles to everyday design.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

- Students will make connections between two design objects intended for different purposes.
- Students will be introduced to the ways in which artists can affect social and political behavior through design.

INTRODUCTORY DISCUSSION

- Ask your students to define the word “propaganda” (they may refer to a dictionary and/or draw on prior knowledge for the definition). Divide your class up into small groups. Ask each group to come up with a set of criteria for successful propaganda.
- In-class writing exercise: Ask your students (with partners or on their own) to choose an object from the classroom that has been designed and manufactured. Examples could range from a paper clip to a slide projector. Ask your class to respond to the following questions: What is the purpose of this object? Does the design successfully address the function of this object? Why or why not? Did the designer(s) take into account how the object looks? Is it an appealing design? How does the design of this object affect behavior (such as when, how, and why it is used)?

IMAGE-BASED DISCUSSION

Begin by looking at Gerrit Rietveld’s *Child’s Wheelbarrow* (Image Nine). Refrain from telling your students the title right away.

- Ask your students to look closely at the object. What basic shapes and forms can they identify in the work? What types of colors do they see? What do they think the object was designed for and why? Tell them that the object is a child’s wheelbarrow. Ask them to explain whether or not they think the wheelbarrow is an example of good design.

Rietveld was a member of *de Stijl* (“the style”), a Dutch group of artists that published a fine arts magazine between 1917 and 1932 devoted to art and architecture. Mondrian (discussed in Lesson One), a well-known member of the group, helped to develop a major principle of *de Stijl*: the perpendicular relationship between vertical and horizontal lines. This compositional concept comes to life in many of Rietveld’s designs for furniture and architecture. In fact, Rietveld’s trademark use of crossing, perpendicular joints became known as the “Rietveld joint.” The Rietveld joint produces designs that, rather than being dovetailed and seamless, reveal their straight-edged, architectural shapes.

- Looking at the image of *Child’s Wheelbarrow* again, ask your class to identify examples of Rietveld’s joint.
- Draw and Describe exercise: Ask your students to work with partners. Direct one member of each pair to be the “drawer.” Direct the other member of each pair to be the “describer.” Ask the drawers to turn their backs on the projected image so that they can no longer see it. Each drawer should have a piece of paper and a pencil. Direct the describers to face the wall. Project Klucis’s *Maquette for Radio-Announcer* (Image Ten) onto the wall. Ask the describers to look at the image. Ask them to describe to the drawers the lines and shapes that they see in this object as clearly as possible, so that their partners can attempt to draw the object. After five minutes or so, ask the students to finish up. Ask them to describe their experience.
- Inform your students of the title and date of Klucis’s work. A “maquette” is a model. Ask them how they think this title might reveal the purpose of the object.

Klucis designed this model of a “radio-announcer” for the transmission of Lenin’s public speech marking the fifth anniversary of the October Revolution of 1917. The bright red letters read “LENIN,” which are superimposed by smaller black letters reading “RECH,” which means “speech.” The smaller black writing along the top reads “Radio Announcer.” In Klucis’s preparatory drawings for the maquette, the outside of the loudspeakers reads “revolution megaphone,” creating further emphasis on the object’s propagandistic purpose.

Klucis designed Maquette for *Radio-Announcer* as part of a series of portable collapsible kiosks and stands to be placed in the streets of Moscow. Some of these stands and kiosks performed multiple tasks simultaneously.

The Maquette for *Radio-Announcer* embodies the simplicity of **Constructivist** objects (such as the works discussed in Lesson Two) in the reciprocal tension of its cables, bold colors, and text. Klucis fully embraced the notion that the significance of art depended on its application to everyday purposes. Klucis and other Russian Constructivists would soon discover that the most effective application of their art would not be in architecture, textiles, or furniture so much as in Soviet propaganda.

- Ask your students to compare the shapes and colors of Maquette for *Radio-Announcer* with Rietveld’s *Child’s Wheelbarrow*.
- Ask your students whether or not they think Maquette for *Radio-Announcer* is a successful design. More specifically, do they think it achieves its propagandistic purpose? Why or why not?

ACTIVITIES

1. School Propaganda

Ask your students to imagine that they have been commissioned to work on a propaganda campaign for their school. The purpose of the campaign could be general publicity or, more specifically, to promote school cleanliness and order, classroom etiquette, or participation in student government or in extracurricular activities.

Using text and artistic techniques such as collage or **photomontage**, your students (individually or in groups) should design a poster for their cause. The posters can be displayed in relevant parts of the school and judged (by students and/or administration) on their effectiveness.

2. Research Propaganda

Credited with being one of the first artists to experiment with photomontage, Klucis produced a remarkable number of propagandistic posters and books distinguished by their striking design and characteristic red, black, and white colors. Some of his most notable designs promoted Stalin’s Five Year Plan.

Ask your students to research and report on Stalin’s Five Year Plan (information can be found on Red Studio, MoMA’s teen Web site: <http://redstudio.moma.org>).

Ask your students to identify the main forms of propaganda in use today. Ask them to come up with an example. Is the propaganda effective? Why or why not?

3. Children's Furniture Design

Ask your students to design a prototype for a piece of furniture intended for a five- to seven-year-old child. The elements of the design must come from basic shapes: circles, semicircles, squares, rectangles, and triangles. Students can interpret the dimensions of the shapes as they see fit (for example, rectangles may be elongated, triangles made narrow or wide, et cetera). Students should begin by drawing a sketch for their design accompanied by a written paragraph explaining its function.

Students should then create a maquette for their design, using glue, tape, scissors, construction paper, and poster board and/or cardboard.

LESSON FIVE: Ideal Performance



IMAGE THIRTEEN: Oskar Schlemmer. German, 1888–1943. Study for “The Triadic Ballet.” c. 1921–23. Gouache, ink, and cut-and-pasted gelatin silver prints on black paper, 22 7/8 x 14 5/8" (57.5 x 37.1 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of Lily Auchincloss



IMAGE FOURTEEN: El Lissitzky. Russian, 1890–1941. *The New Man* from *Figurines: the three-dimensional design of the electro-mechanical Show “Victory over the Sun.”* 1920–1921, published 1923. One from a portfolio of ten lithographs, composition: 12 1/2 x 12 1/2" (30.8 x 32.1 cm); sheet: 21 x 17 1/2" (53.3 x 45.4 cm). Publisher and printer: Robert Leunis & Chapman, Hannover. Edition: 75. The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Purchase 1944. © 2006 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

INTRODUCTION

The history of modern art has many examples of artists’ collaboration with choreographers, musicians, and writers in the staging of performances, many of which shocked audiences. While artists were more likely to be responsible for set designs and costumes, some also wrote and even directed performances.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

- Students will compare two different designs for theatrical costumes by artists Oskar Schlemmer and Lissitzky.
- Students will consider how these artists applied their artistic ideals to theater design.

INTRODUCTORY DISCUSSION

- Ask your students to think about the role that costumes play in a performance. What can costumes tell us about a character? How can costumes tell a story?
- Ask your students what kinds of choices might be made by a director who is staging a performance (dance, opera, or play).
- Ask your students what kinds of choices a set designer might make.
- Ask your students to consider the expectations of an audience going to see a performance. What is the role of the audience?
- Ask your students if they have ever seen a performance that shocked or angered them. Ask them to explain the circumstances.

IMAGE-BASED DISCUSSION

Begin by looking at Schlemmer's Study for "The Triadic Ballet" (Image Thirteen). Explain to your students that this is a preparatory sketch for a ballet developed by the artist.

- Ask your students how many figures they can identify in the image. Ask them to describe each figure in detail. What do your students notice about the space these figures inhabit?
- In-class writing exercise: Ask your students to choose a character in one of the sketches. Ask them to write a short description about the character. Who is this person? What is he or she wearing, and why? Ask what name they would give to the character.

Study for "The Triadic Ballet" reflects Schlemmer's interest in numerical patterns. "We must allow ourselves to be astonished by the marvel of proportion, by the splendour of arithmetical ratios and numerical correspondences, and construct the principles we need from the results of such enquiries," he once wrote.¹²

The word "triadic" refers to the prevalence of the number three in the performance: three dancers, three musical movements, and three artistic elements (dance, costume, and music). Developed by Schlemmer over the course of several years, the ballet did not have a plot. Instead, the figures told a story about moving geometric forms. The ballet was set to music by the avant-garde composer Paul Hindemith.

Between the years 1923 and 1929, Schlemmer, who taught painting, drawing, and sculpture at the German Bauhaus school, also directed the school's "stage" workshop. The Bauhaus, an artistic collective as well as a school, valued the integration of the arts, and focused on producing, "pure," modern forms in painting, furniture, architecture, and other applied arts. The stage workshop made masks, costumes, and sets, and students were trained in professional stage production. The performances, which also toured venues outside of the school, embodied and promoted the Bauhaus. While he used abstracted, geometric forms, Schlemmer maintained the importance of the figure. As he once wrote:

12. Oskar Schlemmer, in "Diary Extracts, July/August 1923," *Art in Theory*, 308.

But one great theme still abides, immemorially old but everlastingly new, the depicted object and creative subject of all times: humanity, the human figure itself. Man has been described as the measure of all things. Indeed!¹³

Direct your students' attention to Lissitzky's *The New Man* (Image Fourteen). Refrain from telling them the title right away.

- **Ask your students what shapes they can identify.**
- **Introduce your students to the work's title, and ask them to identify the figure. Ask them to describe how Lissitzky represented different parts of the body. Does it seem appropriate to them that this figure is called the "*The New Man*?"**

"The New Man" is a character in the radical 1913 Russian Futurist opera *Victory over the Sun*. Met with outrage by audiences when it was first performed in St. Petersburg, *Victory over the Sun* would only be staged once more that year. As the title suggests, the opera tells the tale of conquering the sun. The first half of the opera consists of four scenes featuring the capture of the sun; the second half, consisting of two scenes, explores life after the sun's capture. The audience's discontent was due in part to the radically chaotic music by Mikhail Matiushin and the nonsensical text by Aleksei Kruchenykh. But the audience was also shocked by the minimal set and bright, geometrically shaped costumes designed by Malevich.

Lissitzky saw a production of the opera in 1920 and was inspired to stage it with mechanical puppets. In doing so, Lissitzky would have further reinforced *Victory over the Sun*'s Futurist intentions. In the title page of the portfolio, Lissitzky emphasizes the modern vision of the opera, writing, "The sun as the expression of old world energy is torn down from the heavens by modern man, who by virtue of his technological superiority creates his own energy source." Although the project was never fully realized, Lissitzky's portfolio of puppet designs exists, featuring such wildly named characters as "Globetrotter in Time," "Gravediggers," "Caligula in the Same Person," "Traveler through All the Ages," "Telephone Talker," and "The New Ones."

Lissitzky played a major role in the modern Russian art movements **Suprematism** and **Constructivism**, as well as in the international movements **de Stijl** ("the style"), Bauhaus, and Dada. Like many of his Russian peers, Lissitzky was dedicated to furthering the goals of the Soviet Union. He firmly believed in the benefits of mechanically reproduced art, and he repeatedly mass-produced his books, posters, and prints.

- **Ask your students to compare the figures in Lissitzky's *The New Man* and Schlemmer's *Study for "The Triadic Ballet."* What similarities can they find? Based on their observations and this lesson, ask your students to identify some themes and ideas shared by both artists.**

13. Ibid, 308.

ACTIVITIES

1. And the Award goes to . . .

Ask your students (in groups or individually) to write about a futuristic costume design they consider to have been successful. The costume they choose may be taken from a movie, play, ballet, or opera. Ask your students to consider what kinds of choices the costume designer made and what makes the design effective.

2. Design a Costume

Ask your students to design a set and costumes for a scene from a play (either of their own choosing or from a play being read in class). Students should begin by sketching some designs and writing a proposal outlining their ideas for the costumes and set.

3. Great Collaborations: Art, Dance, Music

Direct your students to research the collaboration projects of artist Robert Rauschenberg, composer John Cage, and choreographer Merce Cunningham.

FOR FURTHER CONSIDERATION

CONCLUDING QUESTIONS

After completing the lessons in this guide, ask your students to make a list of any questions they may still have about one or more of the artists. Organize their questions into categories so that they can conduct their own research. Categories may include biographical questions; questions about a specific work of art, such as why the artist made it and what types of materials the artist used; and questions regarding historical events during the artist's life.

Visit MoMA

Organize a class visit to The Museum of Modern Art, and ask your students to identify an artwork that was included in this guide. Now that they are looking at the actual work, they should consider its size and scale. Ask them to compare the work in the Museum with the reproduction that they saw in the classroom. Do they see any details now that they didn't notice originally in the reproduction? Have their ideas about this work changed? Why or why not?

Ask your students to consider the works of art installed around the one they are viewing. How would they compare the works? Why do they think they were chosen to be exhibited together?

Web Quests

Send students on a Web quest to MoMA's Online Collection at www.moma.org. Ask your students to research other works by artists included in this guide. Students may also want to visit MoMA's teen site, Red Studio, to view online activities; the site's bulletin board "talk back"; and teen-led interviews with artists and curators about issues in art and design.

RESEARCH PROJECTS

Politics and Art

Both Joseph Stalin and Adolph Hitler aggressively opposed the progressive art movements discussed in this guide. By the 1930s, Stalin began to view Soviet Propaganda techniques such as photomontage and bold, abstract design with increasing suspicion. The result would be a government-issued mandate for "social realism." Hitler, having deemed most forms of iconoclastic modern art degenerate, shut down and banned artistic collectives and schools such as the Bauhaus.

Ask your students to research Stalin's Socialist Realism (officially beginning in 1934) and Hitler's 1937 *Degenerate Art* show. What similarities can be found in the two dictators' rationales for banning modern art?

Artists discussed in this guide, such as those involved with the Bauhaus and de Stijl, were inspired to pursue utopian ideals in response to the unprecedented loss of life and destruction of World War I. Ask your students to research other artists, such as the Dadaists and Surrealists (discussed in Modern Art and Ideas 5), who responded to the war and its aftermath.

Looking Ahead

Many of the artists discussed in this guide had a major impact on American art. An influx of European modernists resulting from forced immigration during World War II helped make cities like New York and Chicago leading centers of art. The presence of these artists and architects, along with the rediscovery of the Russian avant-garde and the establishment of the “new” Bauhaus in Chicago, led to a modernist revival.

- **Ask your students to research how artists such as Andy Warhol and Barbara Kruger used techniques pioneered by Klucis, Rodchenko, and Lissitzky such as collage, photomontage, text, and bold colors and designs.**
- **Ask your students to investigate how artists such as Donald Judd and Robert Ryman returned to some of the formal characteristics of Suprematism and Constructivism as practiced by Malevich, Lissitzky, Rodchenko, Popova, and others.**

Bauhaus: The Bauhaus was a school created by the German architect Walter Gropius in 1917, which first opened in Weimar, Germany, and then relocated to Dessau and Berlin, before the Nazis finally closed it down, in 1933. The school's name makes reference to the German word *Bauhütten*, used to describe the homes of stonemasons during the High Middle Ages. The Bauhaus conducted its training through artists workshops, where students gained practical and hands-on skills in art, craft, and architectural and industrial design. The Bauhaus focused on manufacturing artistic designs for household items such as teapots, furniture, lighting fixtures, fabrics, and jewelry.

In 1922 and 1923, the Bauhaus underwent a major shift in ideology. During this time Gropius, who had previously emphasized the need for traditional craftsmanship, turned the Bauhaus' focus to a fusion of technology and art. This philosophical shift was likely the result of the influences of de Stijl and Russian Constructivism. Theo van Doesburg, de Stijl artist, conducted influential lectures in Weimar that were attended by Bauhaus students. Concurrently, a major exhibition of Russian art was held in Berlin. The result was that Bauhaus students and faculty encountered Russian art and even the artists themselves. Russian artists El Lissitzky and Vasily Kandinsky would remain in Germany and go on to become influential Bauhaus participants and faculty. Other well-known artists and architects involved with the Bauhaus include Josef Albers, Marcel Breuer, Paul Klee, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, Lilly Reich, and Oskar Schlemmer.

Cubism: An early-twentieth-century style of representation that abandoned the traditional, three-dimensional representation of space and objects and focused on the geometric depiction of three-dimensional form.

Constructivism: Developed by the Russian avant-garde at the time of the October Revolution of 1917, the goal of this idealistic movement was to make art universally understandable and essential to everyday life. With the founding of the Soviet state in 1922, Constructivists would become increasingly politicized and split into different factions. Constructivist principles would spread and take on new forms in the schools of the German Bauhaus and Dutch de Stijl; however, outside of the newly formed Soviet Union, Constructivism would lose its politically charged meaning. Constructivists (many of them former Suprematists) include Aleksei Gan, Naum Gabo, Ivan Puni (Jean Pougny), Aleksandr Rodchenko, Varvara Stepanova, Georgy and Vladimir Stenberg, and Vladimir Tatlin.

De Stijl: A Dutch term meaning "the style," "de Stijl" was the name of a fine arts magazine published in Leiden from 1917 to 1932. The term also refers to a group of artists and architects whose style of expression was based on the use of primary colors, rectangular shapes, and asymmetrical balance. The de Stijl movement was also a direct response to the chaotic and destructive events of World War I, and its members believed that developing a new artistic style represented a means of rebuilding and of creating harmonic order. De Stijl principles would have a major influence on the German Bauhaus group. Well-known de Stijl artists include Theo van Doesburg, Piet Mondrian, and Gerrit Rietveld.

Futurism: A movement in art and literature that was launched in Italy in 1909 by Filippo Tommaso Marinetti and was devoted to the glorification of the mechanical world, war, and dynamic speed.

Lithography: A printmaking technique based on the repulsion of oil and water, lithography can be used to create a variety of drawn and painterly effects. The term is derived from the Greek words for stone (*litho*) and drawing (*graph*), as the technique involves drawing with grease or a liquid called “tusche” on a polished slab or limestone.

Photomontage: A collage technique, photomontage typically combines photographs with graphic images and text.

Suprematism: Invented by the Russian artist Kazimir Malevich between 1913 and 1914, Suprematism was a new, radical form of painting. The term refers to Malevich’s assertion that the “pure” experience of art expressed in the simplest geometric forms and dynamic compositions reigned supreme over earlier forms of representational art. Suprematism would attract many Russian avant-garde followers, but by 1920 Malevich felt that he had exhausted the possibilities of painting nonobjective, simplified forms. By this time Suprematism was also considered inaccessible and elitist by the Constructivist artists (some of whom were former Suprematists), who would pursue utilitarian material forms ranging from textile design to Soviet propaganda. Well-known artists associated with Suprematism include El Lissitzky, Liubov’ Sergeievna Popova, Ivan Puni (Jean Pougny), Aleksandr Rodchenko, and Olga Rozanova.

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ONLINE RESOURCES

The Museum of Modern Art, New York
www.moma.org.

MoMA's collection online
www.moma.org/collection/

The Russian Avant-Garde Book
www.moma.org/exhibitions/2002/russian/index.html

What Is a Print?
www.moma.org/exhibitions/2001/whatisaprint

Red Studio: A Site for Teens
www.redstudio.moma.org

ADDITIONAL ONLINE RESOURCES

The Bauhaus Archive/Museum of Design, Berlin
www.bauhaus.de/english/index.htm

The Grove Dictionary of Art Online (requires subscription)
www.groveart.com

Timeline of Art History, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York
www.metmuseum.org

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The Museum of Modern Art has a long and rich history of involvement in the careers of many modern artists. A department of Archives was established at MoMA in 1989 to preserve and make accessible to the public historical documents about the Museum and modern and contemporary art. If you would like to set up a workshop for students with a Museum archivist to look through and discuss primary documents of correspondence between the Museum's early directors, curators, and various artists, call (212) 708-9617 or e-mail archives@moma.org.

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