



Wladimir
Malevich

SUPREMATISM

Kazimir Malevich SUPREMATISM

Organized by Matthew Drutt

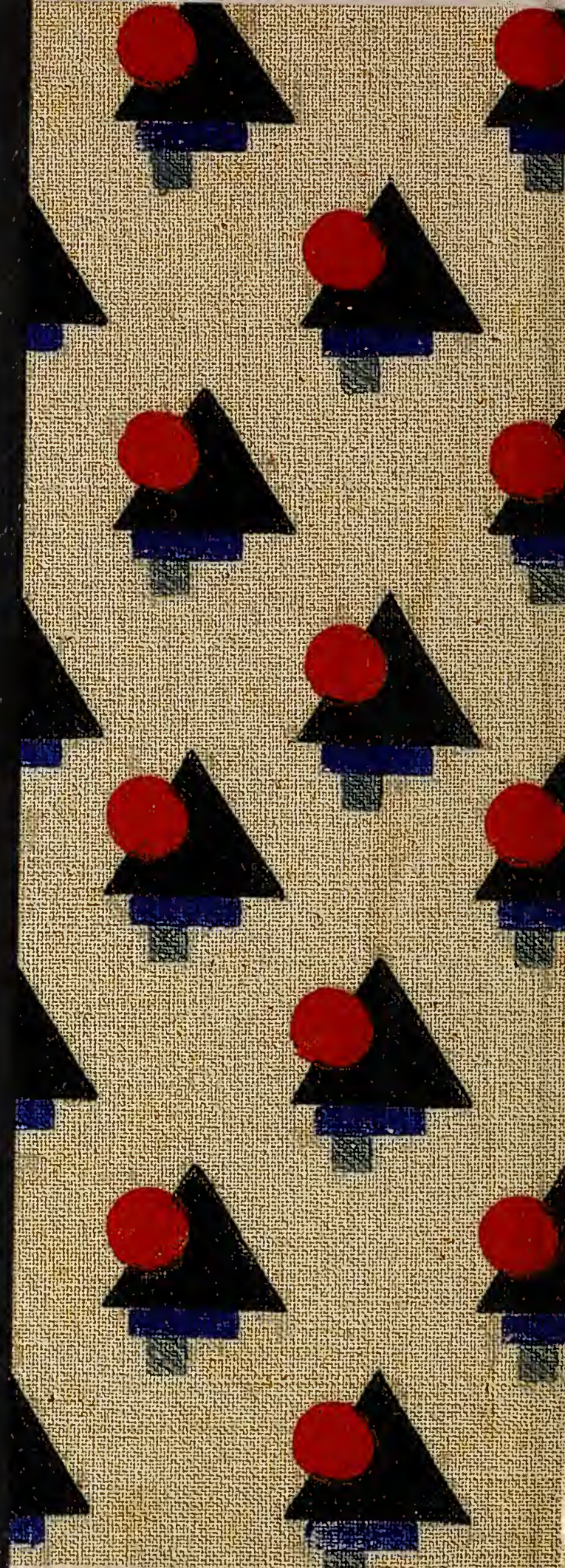
Essays by Matthew Drutt, Nina Gurianova, Jean-Claude Marcadé, Tatiana Mikhienko, Evgenia Petrova, and Vasilii Rakitin

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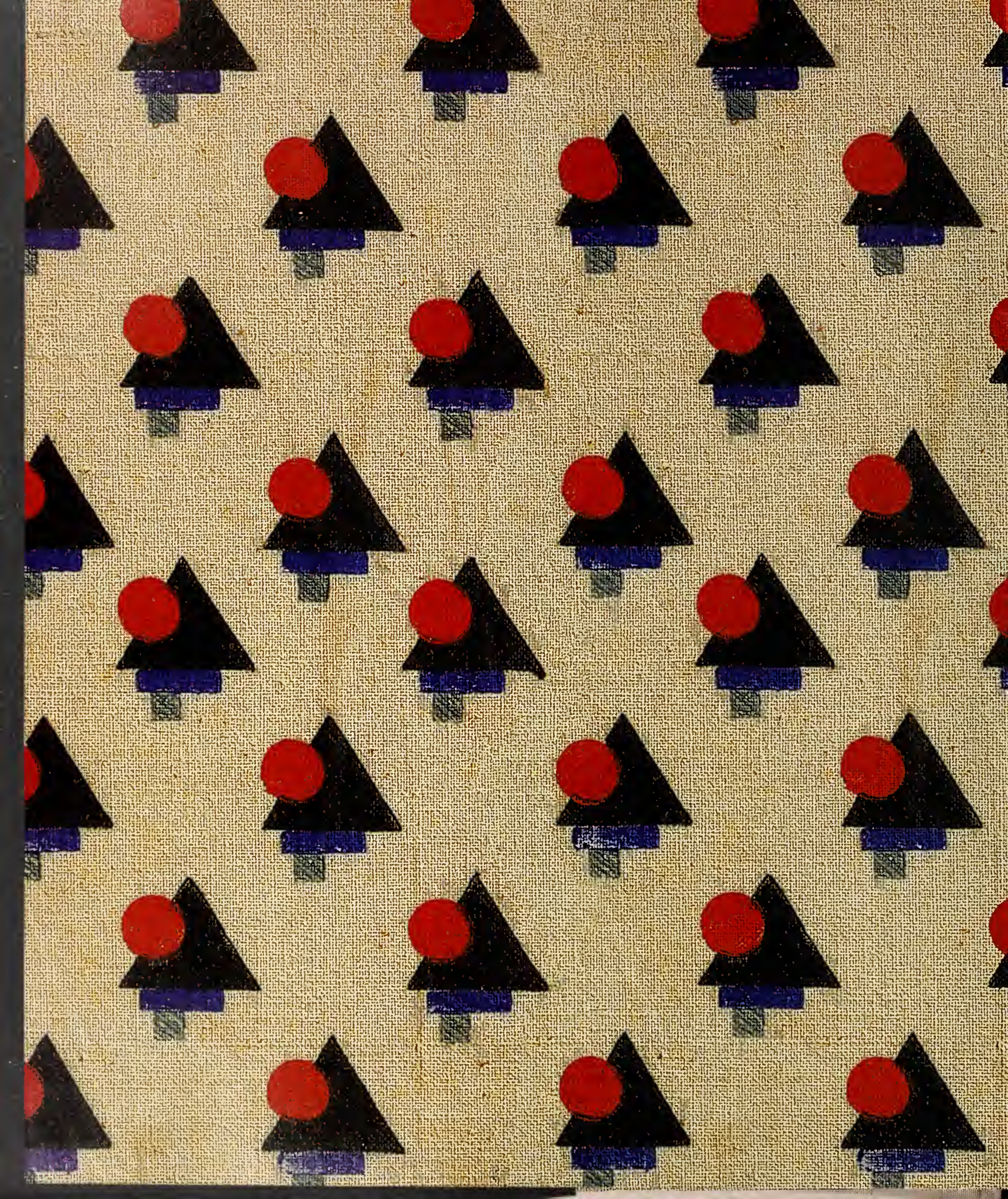
272 pages, 180 illustrations, 120 in full color

In 1915, Kazimir Malevich (1878–1935) changed the future of Modern art when his experiments in painting led the Russian avant-garde into pure abstraction. He called his innovation Suprematism—an art of pure geometric form meant to be universally comprehensible regardless of cultural or ethnic origin. His Suprematist masterpieces, including *Black Square* (1915) and *White Square on White* (1920–27), continue to inspire artists throughout the world.

Accompanying the first exhibition to focus exclusively on this defining moment in Malevich's career, *Kazimir Malevich: Suprematism* features nearly 120 paintings, drawings, and objects, among them several recently rediscovered masterworks. In addition, the book includes previously unpublished letters, texts, and diaries, along with essays by international scholars, who shed new light on this influential figure and his devotion to the spiritual in art.

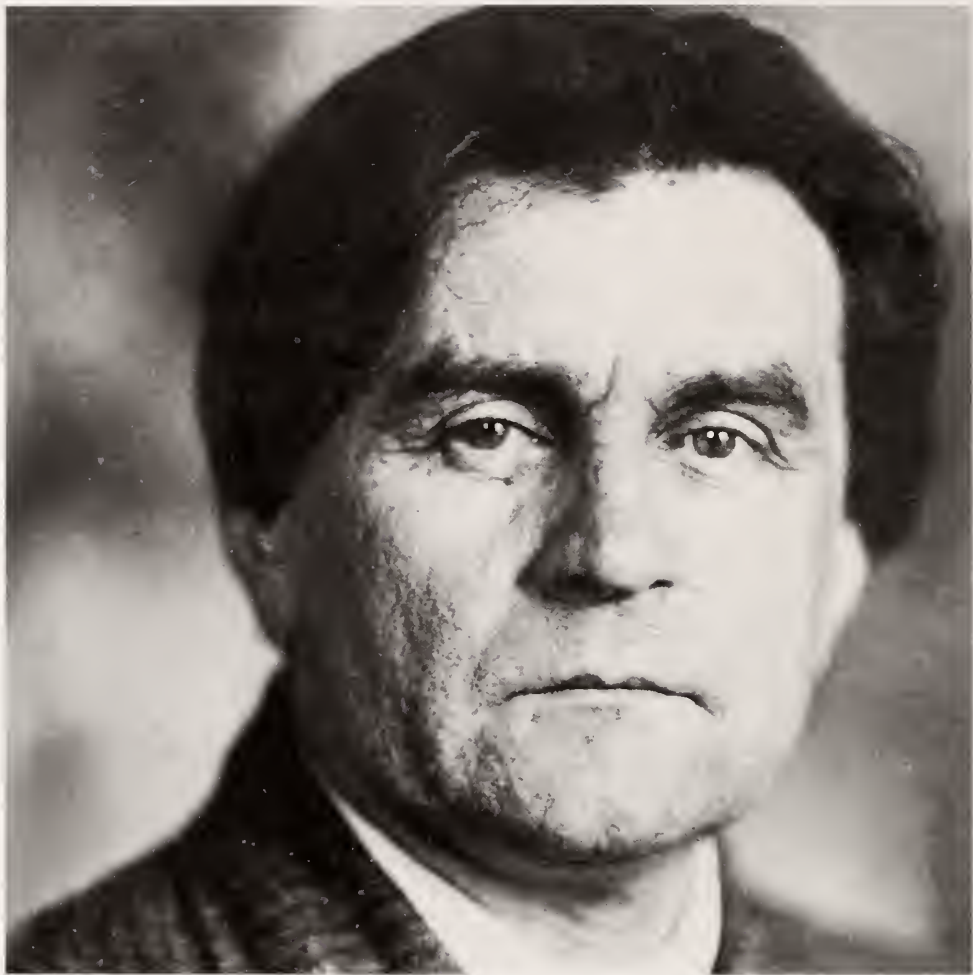






Kazimir Malevich: Suprematism

It is from zero, in zero, that the true movement of being begins.



Kazimir Malevich

MATTHEW DRUTT

SUPREMATISM


GuggenheimMUSEUM

Published on the occasion of the exhibition
Kazimir Malevich: Suprematism
Organized by Matthew Drutt

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On the occasion of the 125th anniversary of the artist's birth, the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum and The Menil Collection are very pleased to join together in the presentation of *Kazimir Malevich: Suprematism*. Our collaboration is especially fitting, for the founders of our respective institutions were inspired by the spiritual quest and aesthetic ideals that exemplify the period in Malevich's art explored by this exhibition. Furthermore, his art became a standard for generations of European and American artists, whose works form the cornerstones of our distinct collections.

For the Guggenheim, this exhibition is the latest manifestation of a commitment to the art of the Russian avant-garde that began early in the institution's history. Masterworks by Marc Chagall, Natalia Goncharova, Vasily Kandinsky, Mikhail Larionov, El Lissitzky, and Kazimir Malevich entered the collection at an early stage. Moreover, the museum has mounted many exhibitions devoted to Russian artists, with no fewer than nineteen since 1945 devoted to Kandinsky alone. The first great retrospective of Malevich's work in this country was presented by the Guggenheim in 1973, with definitive exhibitions of Chagall (1975 and 1993) and Gabo (1986) following shortly thereafter. *Art of the Avant Garde in Russia: Selections from the Costakis Collection* (1981) and *The Great Utopia: The Russian and Soviet Avant-Garde, 1915–1932* remain the two most comprehensive exhibitions ever mounted on the subject, while *Amazons of the Avant-Garde* (2000) offered fresh insights into an understudied aspect of Russian modernism.

The Menil Collection also contains important works by Russian artists, including Ivan Kliun, Larionov, Lissitzky, and Malevich. But it is the spiritual idealism at the heart of Malevich's enterprise that finds its greatest affinity with the Menil's history and collections. Beginning with the construction of the Rothko Chapel in 1971, John and Dominique de Menil demonstrated a commitment to the notion of a sanctuary defined by modern works of art that ultimately translated into the building designed by Renzo Piano to house their collection in 1987. Installations of sacred art from Antiquity, Byzantium, and the Medieval eras, along with galleries devoted to the tribal arts of Africa, Oceania, and the Northwest Coast, provide an historical backdrop to in-depth presentations of modern artists whose own works have a spiritual or enigmatic character, including Dan Flavin, Barnett Newman, Mark Rothko, and Cy Twombly. Moreover, this exhibition

of Malevich's work offers a deeper look at a particular aspect of the artist's career, something that has long been a feature of Menil exhibitions, resulting in new insights about artists long thought to be well understood.

We are therefore greatly indebted to all of the lenders and scholars who have contributed so much to this project's success. At an historical moment when it has become increasingly challenging to sustain sufficient funding for arts programming, we are deeply grateful to those acknowledged here for their support of this landmark exhibition. At the Guggenheim, we must thank Alfa Bank, Moscow, and in particular Mikhail Fridman, Chairman of the Board of Directors, for his leadership and continued support. We would also like to thank Alexander Gafin and Svetlana Smirnova for their creativity and dedication. We are indebted to Harvey S. Shipley Miller and The Judith Rothschild Foundation for their generous support of the exhibition opening dinner in New York. The Menil Collection would like to acknowledge The Brown Foundation, Inc., The Cullen Foundation, Houston Endowment, Inc., and The Wortham Foundation, for their ongoing support of the museum's programs and operations. We are also most grateful to the many individuals whose generosity made the presentation of this exhibition in Houston possible.

Finally, we express our deepest appreciation to Matthew Drutt, Chief Curator of The Menil Collection, for his skillful and thoughtful organization of this ambitious exhibition and publication.

THOMAS KRENS

Director, The Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation

JAMES T. DEMETRION

Interim Director, The Menil Collection

The opportunity to reflect upon Kazimir Malevich's art in a deep and meaningful way is privilege enough. To have been able to do so with the benefit of rediscovered works of art and new documentary materials is a once-in-a-lifetime occasion. Over the past four years of working toward this exhibition, an extraordinary number of people generously shared resources and provided crucial guidance and advice. I must first of all thank the key representatives of the Russian Federation, Mikhail Shvydkoi, Minister of Culture, and Pavel Khoroshilov, Deputy Minister of Culture; Denis Mochanov, Deputy Minister; and Anna Kolupaeva, Head of the Museum Department at the Ministry, for their generous patronage and ongoing support of this project. I am also once again most indebted to Nicolas V. Iljine, European Representative of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, for the important role he played throughout the inception and realization of the exhibition. I must also express my profound gratitude to Krystyna Gmurzynska and Mathias Rastorfer of Galerie Gmurzynska Cologne and Galerie Gmurzynska Zug in Switzerland, who were not only most helpful in arranging key loans from private collections, but who also provided much needed moral support throughout the trials of bringing this exhibition together.

I am especially grateful to Susan Braeuer, Project Curatorial Assistant at The Menil Collection, who deftly managed all aspects of the exhibition and catalogue, with additional assistance provided by Karolina Zelinka, Curatorial Assistant, who also supported me at the Menil. Megan Luke, formerly Project Curatorial Assistant at the Guggenheim, is also to be thanked for her work on the exhibition's early stages, and Zelfira Tregulova, formerly Curatorial Advisor, Guggenheim Russian Projects, once again provided invaluable assistance with regard to Russian lenders.

This exhibition had its first manifestation at the Deutsche Guggenheim Berlin, where it broke all previous records for attendance. I would therefore like to thank Dr. Ariane Grigoteit and Friedhelm Hütte, Global Heads of Deutsche Bank Art, as well as Svenja Gräfin von Reichenbach, Gallery Manager; Uwe Rommel, Head Art Handler and Exhibition Technician, and his team; and Volker Lohs, Deutsche Bank House Technician of GTG for their oversight of the intricate preparations for and installation of the exhibition there. I would like to recognize as well assistance of their colleagues Sara Bernshausen, Britta Färber, and Jörg Klambt.

At The Menil Collection, I am most thankful to James T. Demetron, Interim Director, and his predecessor, Ned Rifkin, as well as to Louisa Stude Sarofim and our entire Board of Trustees,

for their staunch support and enthusiasm for the show. I am also indebted to the following individuals at the Menil who contributed in many ways to this exhibition: Deborah Velders, Head of Exhibitions and Programs; Anne Adams, Registrar; Gary "Bear" Parham, Head of Art Services; Elizabeth Lunning, Chief Conservator; Vance Muse, Head of Communications; William Taylor, Director of Planning and Advancement; and John Reed, retired Chief Financial Officer, and E.C. Moore, Chief Financial Officer.

At the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, I must first of all thank Thomas Krens, Director, for his ongoing support both during my tenure at the Guggenheim and beyond. I am also indebted to the many individuals there whose efforts contributed to the success of this exhibition: Lisa Dennison, Deputy Director and Chief Curator; Marion Kahan, Exhibition Program Manager; Brendan Connell, Assistant General Counsel; Meryl Cohen, Director of Registration and Art Services; Elissa Myerowitz, Associate Registrar; Kathleen Hill, Project Registrar; Scott Wixon, Manager of Art Services and Preparations; Mary Ann Hoag, Lighting Designer; Jeffrey Clemens, Associate Preparator; Ana Luisa Leite, Manager of Exhibition Design; Marcia Fardella, Chief Graphic Designer; and Paul M. Schwartzbaum, Chief Conservator.

This handsome catalogue would not have come to fruition without the talent and imagination of its designer, Eileen Boxer, who is also to be thanked for her insights into various aspects of the exhibition. I express my deep appreciation to the authors whose essays enrich our appreciation of Malevich's art: Nina Gurianova, Jean-Claude Marcadé, Tatiana Mikhienko, Yevgenia Petrova, and Vasilii Rakitin. I am further indebted to Mr. Rakitin, as well as to my colleagues at the Tretyakov Gallery, Irina Lebedeva, Tatiana Mikhienko, and Irina Vakhar, for allowing me to borrow generously from their forthcoming publication on Malevich, *Malevich o Sebe*, which forms the core of the documentary materials and the accompanying commentaries published here in translation for the first time. I would also like to extend my special thanks to Nina N. Suetina for providing the original diaries of Kazimir Malevich, which were of great value to the authors.

I am most grateful for the skillful management of this catalogue by the Guggenheim's Publications department, under the leadership of Anthony Calnek, Deputy Director for Communications and Publishing. I would especially like to thank Elizabeth Franzen, Managing Editor; Elizabeth Levy, Director of Publications; Tracy Hennige, Production Assistant; Stephen Hoban, Editorial Assistant; and Jennifer Knox White, Editor, for their consistently outstanding

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MATTHEW DRUTT

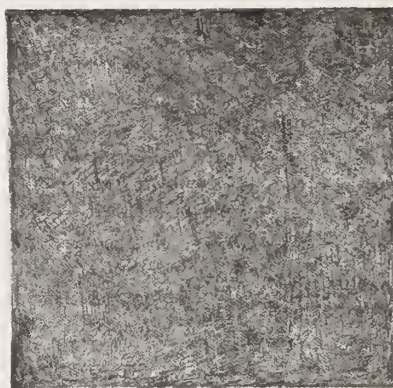
Chief Curator, The Menil Collection

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1913



1913

Das grundlegende sup. Element.
- das Quadrat.

THE BASIC SUPREMATIST ELEMENT, PAGE DESIGN FOR
THE NONOBJECTIVE WORLD (MUNICH ALBERT LANGEN
VERLAG, 1927)
1927, pencil on paper, 10½ x 8½ inches
(26.7 x 21.6 cm)
Kupferstichkabinett, Öffentliche Kunstsammlung Basel

KAZIMIR MALEVICH: SUPREMATISM

Malevich is unquestionably the most celebrated Russian artist of his generation. By the middle of the last century, both Western and Soviet institutions had acquired more of his major works than those of any of his colleagues, and during his brief lifetime no fewer than five solo exhibitions were devoted to his work, both at home and abroad.¹ With the single-mindedness of a missionary or a prophet, Malevich spent nearly fifteen years of his career espousing the aesthetic and moral superiority of a system of abstract art he termed Suprematism. A complete departure from any pictorial method theretofore recognized in art, Suprematism was characterized by Malevich as “that end and beginning where sensations are uncovered, where art emerges ‘as such.’”² He adopted many guises in the service of this new art, from teacher and administrator to theorist and aesthete, all fashioned to bring about a sea change in the way people thought about art and its impact upon the world around them.

The critic Ernst Kallai, in his review of Malevich’s works at the *Grosse Berliner Kunstausstellung (Great Berlin Art Exhibition)* in 1927, acknowledged his singular accomplishment: “It is quite difficult to imagine what further development in painting is possible beyond what has been achieved.”³ But Malevich’s art did not



THE THIRD BASIC SUPREMATIST ELEMENT, PAGE DESIGN
FOR THE NONOBJECTIVE WORLD (MUNICH: ALBERT
LANGEN VERLAG, 1927)
1927, pencil on paper, 8¼ x 10½ inches (20.6 x 26.7 cm)
Kupferstichkabinett, Öffentliche Kunstsammlung Basel

always inspire such critical acclaim. Alexandre Benois, the ideological leader of the Russian Symbolist group *Mir iskusstva* (World of Art), decried his painting *Black Square* (1915) as a “sermon of nothingness and destruction,”⁴ while over a decade later, a Constructivist critic sarcastically denounced one of his more recent pictures as follows: “The only good canvas in the entire Unovis exhibition is an absolutely pure, white canvas with a very good prime coating. Something could be done on it.”⁵

Malevich’s art outlived such pessimism and decades of government repression, as well as the artist’s own descent into self-doubt, which at the end of his career led him to abandon abstraction for a kind of Italianate realism only tenuously connected to his previous concerns. More than merely survive, his art assumed a prominent position in the canon of high Modernism, commanding a level of

respect and influence in the history of art reserved for precious few. And while it might not have seemed so at the time—he encountered great difficulty in securing a place in the project discussed below⁶—the moment of Malevich’s debut in the West was a clear indication of his burgeoning stature.

Keenly aware of their segregation from mainstream currents in Modern art, a committee of Russian artists headed by David Shterenberg organized the first major exhibition celebrating Russian achievements in Modernism for Western audiences.⁷ Opening in the wake of El Lissitzky’s declaration that “The Blockade of Russia is Coming to an End,”⁸ the *Erste russische Kunstausstellung* (*First Russian Art Exhibition*) debuted at the Galerie Van Diemen in Berlin in 1922 before continuing on to the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, presenting more than a thousand works by artists representing nearly every tendency in Russian art of the early twentieth century. More than half of the exhibition was made up of works by more conservative artists, such as Abram Arkhipov, Benois, Boris Kustodiev, Alexander Ivanov, and Sergei Gerasimov; but by far the most notable aspect of the show was the presentation of works by more vanguard artists, such as Natan Altman, Iliia Chashnik, Alexandra Exter, Naum Gabo, Ivan Kliun, Gustav Klutssis, Lissitzky, Liubov Popova, Alexander Rodchenko, Olga Rozanova, and Vladimir Tatlin. For the first time, Western audiences were exposed to the full scope and breadth of the dominant poles of Russian Modernism—Suprematism and Constructivism—which had been waging an ideological battle for supremacy in Russia for several years. And while Malevich was represented in the exhibition by only six pieces, two of which can be positively identified—*Suprematism* (*Supremus no.*

55) (1916, p. 164) and *White Square on White* (1918, p. 201)—the presence of so many works by his students in and around the Unovis group made it clear that he already wielded great authority within Russian artistic circles.

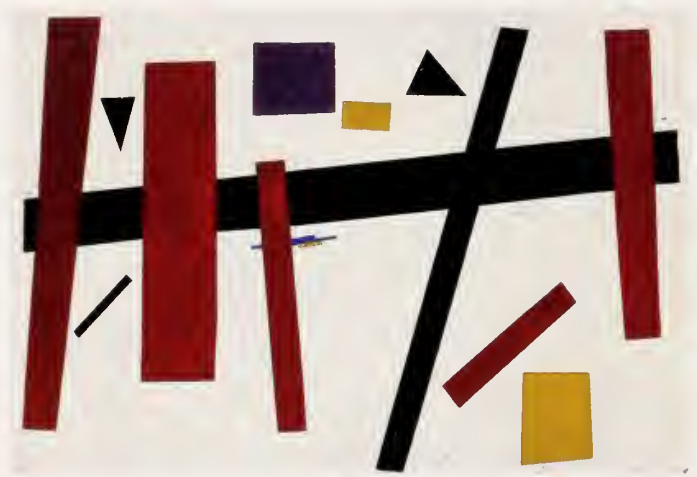
Five years later, in 1927, Malevich had an opportunity to make his case directly, embarking on a three-month tour through Poland and Germany to preach the gospel of his artistic research. It had taken several years for him to get under way. Already in 1924, Malevich had been invited by the Kestner Gesellschaft in Hannover, at the instigation of Lissitzky, to organize an exhibition of his and his students' works to travel around Germany.⁹ In his petition for permission to travel abroad, Malevich noted: "It seems to me that the wave of our painting and artistic-industrial exhibitions in the West is over—all of the works in this area have been shown and the masters of the RSFSR and their achievements have been presented.¹⁰ Now we must prepare for a new wave of new exhibitions. . . . We would show what has not yet been achieved in the West in the area of aesthetics, which is of great interest there now."¹¹

It was not until 1926, following several such petitions, that Malevich was finally granted leave and not until March 1927 that he was able to depart. By then, plans for a larger presentation had devolved into projects focusing primarily on his own work. Malevich traveled to Berlin via Warsaw, where he had a solo exhibition at the Hotel Polonia hosted by the Club of Polish Artists. While the show received an uneven reception in the press,¹² Malevich's month-long stay, which he inaugurated with a spirited lecture on Suprematism, was to have a lasting effect on the development of Polish Modernism.¹³ At the end of the month, he left for Berlin, accompanied by

Tadeusz Peiper, editor of the Polish journal *Zwrotnica*, and found lodging with Gustav von Riesen, an engineer who had worked in Russia many years earlier. In April, Malevich and Peiper visited the Bauhaus in Dessau, where they were greeted by Walter Gropius and László Moholy-Nagy

Through Moholy-Nagy, Malevich was invited to prepare a publication for the series of books being published by the Bauhaus on new currents in Modern art. Entitled *Die gegenstandlose Welt* (*The Nonobjective World*), it was divided into two parts, "Einführung in die Theorie des additionalen Elementes der Malerei" ("Introduction to the Theory of the Additional Element in Painting") and "Suprematismus" ("Suprematism"). Though derived from lectures and articles formulated in a variety of iterations since 1922, the book became a means for Malevich to attempt a more straightforward synthesis of his artistic principles than ever before, translated into a Western language. In the first part, he mapped out in text





SUPREMATISM (SUPREMUS NO. 50)
1915, oil on canvas, 26 x 38 1/2 inches
(66 x 97 cm)
Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam

and sixty-six illustrations aspects of the real world that had inspired the foundations of Suprematism, from the painterly abstractions of natural form found in Impressionism, works by Paul Cézanne, and Cubism to the machine-age marvel of airplanes, blimps, trains, skyscrapers, and aerial views of cityscapes (creating a perhaps unintended parity with Le Corbusier's treatise *Vers une architecture* [*Toward a New Architecture*], published four years prior). In the second part, Malevich launched into the realm of sensation and pure feeling, offering a catalogue of twenty-four ideal Suprematist forms that demonstrated the contrasting states derived from the first three basic Suprematist elements, the black square, the black circle, and the black cross (pp. 16, 18–19), and from more dynamic compositions with connotations of feeling, movement, and sound (pp. 26, 37, 40).¹⁴ While not completely devoid of the more tortuous language for which he had become known,¹⁵ the publication asserted his clearest and most cogent explanation of his practice, and it served to baptize him officially within the annals of the European avant-garde.

However, the great watershed of his visit to Germany occurred in May 1927, when some seventy paintings, gouaches, charts, and drawings spanning his entire career to date were the subject of a special presentation at the *Great Berlin Art Exhibition*. No other Russian artist, not even Kandinsky, who had been celebrated in Germany long before Malevich, had ever received such distinguished attention. Even the normally reserved Russian Commissar for Education, Anatoly Lunacharsky, noted, "The artist Malevich, in spite of the exclusivity of his approach to painting, is, of course, a great master. It is not surprising that in a country where the incomprehensible

Kandinsky could be successful, the more synthetic and courageous Malevich would find favor, especially after his present turn toward hard and harsh painting.”¹⁶ The exhibition became a defining moment in Malevich’s career in terms of the reception of his work in the West, not just at the time, but subsequently also; as it turns out, the works shown would become, outside Russia, the primary source of knowledge of Malevich’s oeuvre for the next fifty years.

Malevich returned to Leningrad on June 5, four months before his exhibition closed, to continue his work at the Gosudarstvennyi institut istorii iskusstv (State Institute for the History of Art). He may have planned to return to Germany, perhaps even to settle there; he had left his works in the exhibition in the care of Hugo Häring, the secretary of the architectural association responsible for organizing the show, and had entrusted his host, von Riesen, with a package of his writings. Evidently concerned about his fate and the disposition of these materials, Malevich drew up a will in the case of his untimely death.¹⁷ His apprehensions were well founded; Malevich never returned to the West. In a matter of only a few years, his research and art fell out of favor with colleagues at the Institute in Leningrad, culminating in his expulsion and the dismantling of his department in 1930 as the political climate shifted swiftly toward more staunchly conservative views of cultural production hostile to the avant-garde’s model. While his solo exhibition at the State Tretiakov Gallery in Moscow in November 1929 was well regarded by some critics,¹⁸ it showed the first evidence of Malevich’s disillusionment with abstraction (perhaps brought about by political pressure), in a series of recent paintings in a figurative mode that returned to the earlier days of Cubo-Futurism. He was no doubt aware of

his precarious position within the prevailing political climate in Russia, which prohibited his contact with colleagues in the West. His solo exhibition in Kiev, which opened in April 1930, was denounced in the official press. “However, in spite of all of the wonderful aspects of Malevich’s creative work, the foundation of his artistic activity is foreign to proletarian culture. His entire work conveys the notion that he, as a bourgeois artist, needs art not for serving society but only for the sake of form.”¹⁹

That September, he was jailed for several months by the OGPU (United State Political Agency) following his expulsion from the Institute amid accusations by colleagues there that he was practicing “formalism” (by that time a blanket condemnation for anyone thought to be indulging in bourgeois aesthetics), and he was interrogated extensively about his views on art and his activities abroad.²⁰ In the transcript of this examination, Malevich repeatedly defends his work as having been carried out on behalf of the ideals of the Soviet state: “There were no attempts on the part of the practitioners of the bourgeois tendency to win me over to their side, nor could there have been, as my convictions and views on art, based on thirty years of work, are known.”²¹ His contentions were in vain. Though finally released on December 8, Malevich was increasingly ostracized by a cultural bureaucracy now dominated by Realist academicians. In the last years of his life, which ended abruptly in 1935 following a brief illness, Malevich focused increasingly upon his legacy, bracketing his abstract experiments of 1915–28 with backdated Post-Impressionist landscapes and neo-Renaissance portraits designed to create a logical progression of styles and attitudes in his work.²² However,



SUPREMATISM (SELF-PORTRAIT IN TWO DIMENSIONS)
1915, oil on canvas, 31½ x 24¾ inches
(80 x 62 cm)
Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam

these works would not become known outside Russia until several decades after they were made.

Instead, the Western view of Malevich's art in general, and Suprematism in particular, during much of the last century was primarily shaped by the works from the *Great Berlin Art Exhibition*, thanks to Häring and the interventions of Alexander Doerner, director of the Provinzialmuseum in Hannover, and Alfred Barr, director of the Museum of Modern Art in New York, who saw to it that these works found their way into public collections. (Fifty-one paintings, gouaches, and drawings were acquired from Häring by the Stedelijk Museum alone in 1958; pp. 22 and 129) Over the next fifty years, they were published or exhibited in a variety of contexts, from books or exhibitions devoted to Malevich to those concerning abstract art in general, all of which served to further secure his place in the history of art.²³ The defining moment of this phase was the landmark exhibition, organized in conjunction with the publication of Troels Andersen's catalogue raisonné of the 1927 Berlin show, that traveled to the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York (p. 23) and the Pasadena Art Museum in 1973.²⁴ While his works were certainly not unknown to American audiences—paintings by Malevich had been on view at the Museum of Modern Art since 1936—this broad survey brought a historical depth and scholarly context to his work not seen before in the United States. Moreover, its timely presentation corresponded with the reductivist strategies dominating American art at the time, in the works of Carl Andre, Mel Bochner, Dan Flavin, Donald Judd, Ellsworth Kelly, Sol LeWitt, Robert Mangold, and Brice Marden, among others. In his review of the exhibition, Judd hailed Malevich as *the* pioneer of

nonobjective art: "It's obvious now that the forms and colors in the paintings that Malevich began painting in 1915 are the first instances of form and color. . . . His work is more radical than Mondrian's, for example, which has a considerable idealistic quality and which ultimately has an anthropomorphic, if 'abstract,' composition of high and low, right and left. Art doesn't change in sequence. By now there is work and controversy many times over within the context Malevich established."²⁵

Following that exhibition, slowly increasing access to artworks in both public and private collections in Russia and elsewhere in the East progressively yielded a broader understanding of the scope and depth of Malevich's achievements.²⁶ The first major museum exhibition to take advantage of this was *Malevitch*, organized by Pontus Hulten for the Musée National d'Art Moderne in Paris in 1978.²⁷ Of the 234 objects assembled, only forty-six were paintings (nineteen of which were Suprematist), and thus the exhibition offered the most in-depth review of Malevich's drawings and graphic art seen to that time, with the greatest number of these works coming from Russian private collections. Even more ambitious, however, was the collaborative exhibition *Kazimir Malevich, 1878–1935*, organized by the State Russian Museum in St. Petersburg (then Leningrad), the State Tretyakov Gallery in Moscow, and the Stedelijk Museum in 1988, which presented the most comprehensive survey of his career to date, with some 215 paintings, drawings, prints, sculptures, books, and utilitarian objects, approximately fifty of which dated from the Suprematist period (1915–30). This was followed, in 1990–91, by another survey in the United States; though slightly smaller in scope and with far fewer Suprematist works, the exhibition occasioned an



KAZIMIR MALEVICH. NOVEMBER 16, 1973–JANUARY 13, 1974. SOLOMON R. GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM, NEW YORK



SUPREMATISM PAINTERLY REALISM OF A FOOTBALL PLAYER
(COLOR MASSES IN THE FOURTH DIMENSION)
1915, oil on canvas, 27½ x 17¾ inches
(70 x 44 cm)
Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam

extensive scientific study of Malevich's working method, which yielded new insight into his painterly technique.²⁸ And in 1992, *The Great Utopia: The Russian and Soviet Avant-Garde, 1915–1932*, organized by the Guggenheim Museum, included key works by Malevich situated within the most encyclopedic exhibition of Russian Modern art to date, underscoring Malevich's dominant position among his peers and students and offering Western audiences the full scope of Russian Modernism for the first time since the *First Russian Art Exhibition* of 1922.²⁹

But as much as these exhibitions were crucial to the interpretation and evaluation of Malevich's art, none of them benefited from the recent rediscovery of major paintings and drawings as well as letters and other documentary materials long thought lost or destroyed or else completely unknown, most of which belonged to the legendary historian, collector, and custodian of the Russian avant-garde Nikolai Khardzhiev. Little known outside Russia until a decade ago, Khardzhiev was more than a scholar; he was a trusted associate of many of the artists, including Velimir Khlebnikov, Aleksei Kruchenykh, Kliun, Lissitzky, Malevich, Vladimir Mayakovsky, and Tatlin. When he succeeded in emigrating to the Netherlands in 1993, something he had been attempting for twenty years,³⁰ he took with him his collection of some 1,350 artworks of the Russian avant-garde and countless letters and documents.³¹ Within this vast repository were eight major paintings and hundreds of drawings, sketches, notes, and manuscripts by Malevich. These materials are the *raison d'être* for the current exhibition.

While the number of artworks in the Khardzhiev collection may seem small in comparison to what has been in the public eye for so many years, it is their

superior quality and uniqueness that makes them so fundamentally important to a reconsideration of Malevich's art. Some of the works fill in chronological gaps, while others significantly deepen our understanding of his painterly method as well as his use of drawing. Taken as a whole, this exhibition is the first major presentation of Malevich's art to focus on Suprematism, to the relative exclusion of those phases that led him both into and out of its path. Thus it provides greater insight into the most important phase of his career and broadens his oeuvre with major works.

Our point of departure is a selection of eight drawings for the decor of the Futurist opera *Pobeda nad solnstem* (*Victory Over the Sun*), on which Malevich collaborated with Kruchenykh and Mikhail Matiushin in 1913. While five of these drawings are well known, they are joined for the first time by three additional sketches from the Khardzhiev-Chaga Cultural Foundation in Amsterdam (pp. 101–03). The drawings are representative of Malevich's Cubo-Futurist style, but they have also long been regarded as the "unconscious" starting point for Suprematism. Each of the compositions is framed within the format of a square—later the primary Suprematist element—and the profusion of planar geometric forms that invade the pictorial space looks forward to more dynamic, nonobjective studies done in 1915 (pp. 149, 168). In this regard, Malevich's *Study for the Decor of Victory Over the Sun, Act 2, Scene 5* (1913, p. 100), which as the singularly nonobjective work in this early group has historically been held up as prefiguring later Suprematist ideas without truly resembling a known Suprematist composition, finally compares nicely to both the roughly contemporaneous *Cubo-Futurist Composition: Man*

Smoking a Pipe (1913, p. 111) and the later *Suprematism: Square on a Diagonal Surface* (1915, p. 133), where the division of the square into contrasting zones of light and dark takes three distinct but related tacks.

The other early works to prefigure Malevich's Suprematist phase are the *Alogic* compositions of 1914–15, examples of transrational (*zaum*) realism represented here by three major paintings and nine drawings. Malevich's *Alogic* works are playful and cryptic, employing abstract geometric form more freely than his previous Cubo-Futurist works. In the same way that the transrational verse of poets like Khlebnikov and Kruchenykh attempted to open up new possibilities in language through an intuitive, absurdist aesthetic that challenged all sense of commonly accepted reason (as in the libretto for *Victory Over the Sun*, for instance), Malevich's *Alogic* works were experiments with visual form intended to confound conventional picture making, inventing new relations or associations derived from a "random" collision between seemingly unrelated images and shapes. "We come to the rejection of reason," Malevich wrote, "but this has been possible only because a different form of reason has arisen within us. . . . It has its own law and construction and also meaning, and only in the light of this knowledge will our work be based on a totally new, transrational precept."³² Alternately compacted and open, the *Alogic* works, which combine images of "real" elements such as animals, utensils, and musical instruments with abstract shapes, are critical for understanding how Malevich would end up inventing a new visual language that, while inherently nonobjective in appearance, continued for many years to refer to things in the real world. Thus, in a work like *Suprematism: Painterly*

Экспонаты выставки
М. Малевича на Археологическом Музее
Томской Академии Наук в Томске
Сентябрь 1913 года



1913
Экспонаты выставки

ELONGATED SQUARE, PAGE DESIGN FOR *THE NONOBJECTIVE WORLD* (MUNICH: ALBERT LANGEN VERLAG, 1927)
1927, pencil on paper, 8 1/8 x 10 1/2 inches
(20.6 x 26.7 cm)
Kupferstichkabinett, Öffentliche Kunstsammlung Basel

Realism of a Football Player. Color Masses in the Fourth Dimension (1915, p. 146), the direct descendant of Malevich's ideas about the transrational, the composition is confusing if interpreted as attempting to represent something real; instead, it has its own inherent logic, one that is both self-referential and remotely tied to experiences in everyday life. Even the "logic" of the work's orientation is open to question: there is no one correct direction in which to view the work. Assumptions of up, down, or sideways are thrown into chaos, at least they were in Malevich's lifetime, when he was fond of displaying works in various ways, constantly redefining the way in which a given composition resolved itself visually (hence the alternate orientations of a few works reproduced in this essay and in the exhibition views illustrated in the "Letters and Documents" section).

The exhibition finally unfolds into the orthodox space of Suprematism, opening with the basic Suprematist forms of the square, circle, and cross and ending with Malevich's early forays into figurative adaptations of Suprematist principles in the late 1920s. While Malevich painted four versions of *Black Square* during his career,³³ this exhibition marks the first occasion that the original painting from 1915 is being shown outside Russia. This is significant in and of itself, but *Black Square* is also accompanied in the exhibition by its three siblings of the same primary phase, *Black Cross* (1915, p. 121), *Black Circle* (1915, p. 120) and *Elongated Plane* (1915, p. 123), the latter two of which have never been shown since they were first exhibited by Malevich. *Elongated Plane* was heretofore known only through a documentary photograph of *Posledniaia futuristicheskaia vystavka kartin, "0.10"* (*nul-desat*): *The Last Futurist Exhibition of*

Paintings: "0.10" [Zero-Ten], held in Petrograd in 1915, and its variant form illustrated in *The Nonobjective World* (p. 26). And while *Black Square*, *Black Circle*, and *Black Cross* have been shown together many times in their 1920s versions (all of which are in the collection of the State Russian Museum), the 1915 paintings offer a completely different experience. They are more intimate in scale and more densely painted, and they contain the scumbled surfaces, intensity of brushwork, and aura of intuition that is completely absent in the more resolved, chalky, and thinly rendered versions of the 1920s. Thus we have the opportunity for the first time to regard Malevich's primary Suprematist objects as a group in their original versions.

Two other Khardzhiev works from this period, which were also previously known only through documentary photographs or references in correspondence, offer even more insight into Malevich's painterly skill. *Pictorial Realism of a Peasant Woman in Two Dimensions, called Red Square* (1915, p. 127), which at one time belonged to Malevich's comrade Matiushin, is the first of two versions, and again this first work, which in this case might predate the other by only several months, is more richly composed and intimate in scale.³⁴ The ruby red pigment of the square form has a depth and glow that is in stark contrast to the flatter, more evenly composed orange-red of its relative, and unlike the later work, which is square in shape overall, here the red form is situated slightly askew on a white rectangular field, placing it within the context of paintings like *Painterly Realism. Boy with Knapsack-Color Masses in the Fourth Dimension* (1915, p. 128) and *Suprematist Painting. Black Rectangle, Blue Triangle* (1915, p. 129). However, *Suprematist Composition with*



Plane in Projection (1915, p. 131) is unlike any other painting by Malevich in form, composition, and technique. Known until now only through a documentary photograph of it from Malevich's 1920 exhibition (p. 255), the painting has a thick, enamel-like surface that is uncharacteristically tight. It appears that Malevich often painted over the surface of works before they had completely dried in these early years, so the compositions are often cracked, as in the extreme case of the 1915 *Black Square*. The surface of *Suprematist Composition with Plane in Projection*, however, remains intact, perhaps because of some variation in the ingredients of the pigment, for its milky white ground is almost without parallel in his works of this year or any other period. The painting has the quality of an enameled object, due to both the rich luster and depth afforded by the lapis blue pigment and the lacquer-like smoothness of its white ground.

The next, more dynamic phase of Suprematism, from 1915 to 1917 (pp. 165, 174, 141), is highlighted by another work formerly belonging to Khardzhiev, also previously known only through a photograph and very different from its contemporaries in form and conception: *Suprematist Composition* (1915, p. 149), illustrated here but not included in the exhibition. Whereas other paintings close to it in date (such as *Suprematist Painting: Eight Red Rectangles* [1915, p. 143] and *Suprematist Painting* [1916, p. 177]) are characterized by multicolored forms bound to one another by the appearance of magnetic or static order, even when the forms appear to hang freely in space, *Suprematist Composition* offers a cacophony of tumbling black shapes, offset by a small yellow circle. It thus expands upon Malevich's vocabulary of this period in a way that is entirely unique, providing a substantial

example of formal ideas previously known in his work only through minor drawings (p. 168).

Yet another rediscovered work, *Dissolution of a Plane* (1917, p. 191), is by far the largest Suprematist painting by Malevich, and, as such, it has a dramatic, almost imposing presence. Previously identified as one of the key 24 forms in his Suprematist repertoire through one of the drawings for *The Nonobjective World* (p. 40), it belongs to the next phase of Malevich's work, when compositions took on greater associations with magnetic and acoustic resonance and states of feeling linked to ethereal form or existence. As in its more famous sibling, *Suprematist Painting* (1917–18, p. 193), a large planar form dissolves into the infinite expanse of a white void, rendered even more successfully here by virtue of the plane's disappearance from the picture at the top-right and lower-right corners; it literally recedes from the painting to an imaginary plane beyond.

On the other end of the spectrum is *Suprematism of the Mind (Suprematism of the Spirit)* (1920, p. 227), a more static composition known through its many iterations in drawing and graphic form but until now unknown as a painting. Dating from the period during which the spiritual dimensions of Suprematism became more formally linked with religious painting through Malevich's adaptation of the Orthodox cross (as in the two versions of *Suprematism (Mystic Suprematism)* [1920–22, pp. 230–31]), *Suprematism of the Mind* is literally a Suprematist icon, painted on a wooden panel, entirely unique as such in his oeuvre, and as compelling in its modest scale as *Dissolution of a Plane* is in its enormity.

Finally, a recently restored architekton, *Suprematist Architectural Model* (1927, p. 209), is reintroduced into

the now sparse inventory of architectural forms created by Malevich in the early to mid-1920s. Its significance is discussed at length in Tatiana Mikhienko's essay. Along with several other partially original and partially reconstructed architektons and a small selection of utilitarian objects, the model presents a very cogent articulation of Malevich's application of Suprematist principles into the realm of the practical.

The exhibition also benefits from new information about the dating of works, something that is extremely complex in his oeuvre due as much to his own habit of intentionally misdating pieces as to any previously missing evidence. (Malevich insisted, for example, that *Black Square* and other works were created in 1913 rather than 1915.) Here again, we have benefited from the letters and documents in the Khardzhiev archive, as well as from the recent publication of Andrei Nakov's first volume of the catalogue raisonné. But while the sequence of works in this publication reflects certain assumptions about chronology, it is not absolute in this regard: certain works have been grouped together as much according to formal relationships as to their dates.

At the beginning of this essay, it was suggested that this project seeks a more in-depth look at Malevich's Suprematism than has previously been undertaken. This has been afforded by a greater concentration of his Suprematist paintings and drawings than in earlier posthumous exhibitions of Malevich's work. As one of the project's premises, we decided not to include the very important work of his students, which would make for a much larger, if not more comprehensive undertaking. Indeed, his work as a teacher cannot be absolutely separated from his work as an artist, something suggested in

Vasilii Rakitin's and Nina Gourianova's essays, and made compellingly clear in a recent exhibition presented in Russia.³⁵ However, we chose here to be more orthodox, also stopping at the threshold of the phase in the late 1920s and early 1930s when Malevich returned to the human figure. The few works included here from that phase (pp. 130, 232, 233) demonstrate how his first iterations of the Suprematist figure are inseparable from certain formulations of the Crucifixion in abstract form by Malevich, and thus are representative of the increasingly mystical connotations that he brought to his art toward the end of his life. The works that followed upon these took an entirely different tack, beginning a new, albeit truncated, chapter in Malevich's art that, in the end, is a very different story than the one told here.

Notes

- 1 Of course, while his works were widely collected by Russian museums in his lifetime, their subsequent repression in the 1930s kept them hidden from the public eye until the late 1980s. The five solo exhibitions of Malevich's work held during his lifetime were *16-aja gos. Vystavka Personal'naja vystavka K. S. Malevica Ego put' ot impresionizma k suprematizmu*, Salles B. Dimitrovka (formerly Salon K. Mikhailova), Moscow, opened March 25, 1920; *Vystawa Kazimiera Malewica*, Club of Polish Artists, Hotel Polonia, Warsaw, March 20–25, 1927; *Sonderausstellung Malewitsch*, part of *Grosse Berliner Kunstausstellung*, Lehrter Bahnhof, Berlin, May 7–September 30, 1927; *Vystavka proizvednii K. S. Malevicha*, State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow, opened November 1, 1929; and *Personalnaia vystavka Malevicha*, Kiev Picture Gallery, ca. April–June 1930.
- 2 Kazimir Malevich, "Suprematism" (before 1927), in Troels Andersen, ed., *K. S. Malevich: The Artist, Infinity, Suprematism, Unpublished Writings 1913–1933* (Borgen. Copenhagen, 1978), p. 146.
- 3 Ernst Kallai, "Kazimir Malevich," *Kunstblatt*, no. 7 (1927). The full review appears in the Documents section of this publication.
- 4 See Alexandre Benois, "The Last Futurist Exhibition," transcript of speech delivered on January 1, 1916, in the Documents section of this publication.
- 5 S. Iutkevich, "Sukharnaia stolitsa," *LEF*, no. 3 (1923), p. 183.
- 6 See, for example, the following text in the Documents section of this publication: Letter from Malevich to David Shterenberg, February 16, 1921, Vitebsk.
- 7 Russian art was by no means a complete mystery to the West, but this was the first show to focus more on developments in Russia as opposed to the work of emigré artists such as Alexander Archipenko, Lev Bakst, Alexandre Benois, Marc Chagall, Natalia Goncharova, Vasily Kandinsky, Mikhail Larionov, and Ivan Puni, whose art had already been shown in gallery exhibitions in France and Germany. See *The First Russian Show: A Commemoration of the Van Deimen Exhibition Berlin 1922*, exh. cat. (London: Annely Juda Fine Art, 1983).
- 8 *Veshch/Gegestand/Objet*, no. 1–2 (March–April 1922), unpaginated.
- 9 See the letter from the Kestner Gesellschaft, Hannover, to Malevich, December 30, 1924, in the Documents section of this publication.
- 10 Malevich could be referring here to the large presentation of Russian art at the *Exposition internationale des arts décoratifs et industriels modernes (International Exhibition of Modern Decorative and Industrial Arts)*, Grand Palais, Paris, 1925.
- 11 See the petition from Malevich to Glavnauka requesting permission to travel abroad, ca. December 9, 1925, in the Documents section of this publication.
- 12 See, for example, the following reviews in the Documents section of this publication: Konrad Vinkler, *The Exhibition of Prof. Malevich in the Club of Polish Artists and the Theory of Suprematism*, *Kurier Poranny* (No. 89, March 30, 1927) and Jan Klecinski, *Suprematism* (excerpt from the article "Idea and Form. Essays on the Development of Polish Art" Warsaw, ca. 1931).
- 13 See *Presences Polonais: L'art vivant autour du Musée de Lodz*, exh. cat. (Paris: Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, 1983).
- 14 The full set of original drawings for this book, some of which are reproduced here, are in the collection of the Kupferstichkabinett of the Kunstmuseum Basel. They contain inscriptions by Malevich in Russian and German pertaining to the significance of each form, and many also carry the spurious date of 1913, this has contributed over the years to confusion in dating Malevich's first Suprematist work.
- 15 His reputation as a convoluted writer was already a subject of some discussion. Consider Anatole Lunacharsky's remarks (cited in the Documents section of this publication): "I heard the Germans were also taken aback by his writings. I made an attempt to read the grandiloquent and obscure theoretical works by the leader of the 'Suprematists.' In a confused manner, he seems to try to somehow link his goals and path with the Revolution and with God." See also Jean-Claude Marcadé's essay in this publication.
- 16 See the review by Lunacharsky in the Documents section of this publication.
- 17 The circumstances of his departure from Germany and the eventual dispersal of his works left there are well documented. See, for instance, Joop Joosten, "Malevich in the Stedelijk Museum," in *Kazimir Malevich, 1878–1935*, exh. cat. (Leningrad: State Russian Museum, Moscow: State Tretyakov Gallery, and Amsterdam: Stedelijk Museum, 1988), pp. 44–54, and "Berlin 1927," in *Kazimir Malevich 1878–1935*, exh. cat. (Los Angeles: Armand Hammer Museum of Art and Cultural Center, 1990), pp. 22–27.
- 18 See, for example, the following commentaries in the Documents section of this publication: A. Fiodorov-Davydov, "Iskusstvo K. S. Malevicha " And I. V. Kliun, *Problema tsveta v zhivopisi 1928–1929, Maliarnoe Delo* (No. 2, 1931).
- 19 See the commentary by S. Yefimovich in the Documents section of this publication.
- 20 The full transcript of his examination is published for the first time in this volume (see the Documents section).
- 21 Ibid.
- 22 For an excellent summary and evaluation of this work and Malevich's dates in general, see Elena Bassner, "Malevich's Paintings in the Collection of the Russian Museum (The Matter of the Artist's Creative Evolution)," in *Kazimir Malevich in the Russian Museum* (St. Petersburg: Palace Editions, 2000), pp. 15–27.

23 See, for example, Louis Lozowick, *Modern Russian Art* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, Societe Anonyme, Inc 1925), *Cubism and Abstract Art*, exh. cat. (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1936), *Fantastic Art, Dada, and Surrealism*, exh. cat. (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1936), *Konstruktivisten (Constructivists)*, exh. cat. (Basel: Kunsthalle, 1937), *The Collection of the Societe Anonyme*, exh. cat. (New Haven: Yale University Art Gallery, published for the Associates in Fine Arts, 1950), *Kasimir Malevitch*, exh. cat. (Braunschweig: Kunstverein Braunschweig, 1958), *Kasimir Malevich, 1878–1935*, exh. cat. (London: Whitechapel Art Gallery, 1959), *Casimir Malevic*, exh. cat. (Rome: Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna, 1959), *Two Decades of Experiment in Russian Art, 1902–1922*, exh. cat. (London: Grosvenor Gallery, 1962), Camilla Gray, *The Great Experiment: Russian Art, 1863–1922* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1962), and *Art in Revolution: Soviet Art and Design since 1917*, exh. cat. (London: Hayward Gallery, 1971)

24 See the accompanying publication, Troels Andersen, *Malevich. Catalogue Raisonné of the Berlin Exhibition, 1927, including the Collection in the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam* (Amsterdam: Stedelijk Museum, 1970)

25 Donald Judd, "Malevich: Independent Form, Color, Surface," *Art in America*, vol. 62, no. 2 (March–April 1974), pp. 52–58, reprinted in *Donald Judd: Complete Writings 1959–1975* (New York: New York University Press, 1975), pp. 211–15. There is much more to be said on this subject, and I am currently working on an article dealing more specifically with the question of Malevich and American art in the 1960s and 1970s. I am grateful to Rudi Fuchs for his suggestions on the topic.

26 Of particular importance here are the many exhibitions organized by Anneli Juda Fine Art in London, Galerie Gmurzynska in Cologne, and Leonard Hutton, Inc., in New York beginning in the 1970s. Their efforts in bringing art out of Russia made ensuing museum projects possible.

27 See *Malevitch*, exh. cat. (Paris: Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, 1978)

28 See Milda Viktorina and Alla Lukanova, "A Study of Technique: Ten Paintings by Malevich in the Tretyakov Gallery," in *Kazimir Malevich 1878–1935* (Los Angeles: Armand Hammer Museum of Art and Cultural Center, 1990), pp. 187–97. The exhibition also traveled to the National Gallery of Art, Washington and the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

29 The Los Angeles County Museum of Art organized a broad survey of the Russian avant-garde in 1980, but it was less comprehensive than the Guggenheim exhibition, and, characteristic of scholarship from this period, its catalogue, while noteworthy for the scope of its subject matter, contains occasionally erroneous information. See Stephanie Barron and Maurice Tuchman, eds., *The Avant-garde in Russia, 1910–1930. New Perspectives* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1980).

30 Khardzhiev originally intended to emigrate to Sweden in the late 1970s. With the assistance of his friend and colleague Roman Jakobson, the celebrated linguist who successfully emigrated to the United States earlier in the decade, he was put in contact with Bengt Jangfeldt, a former Jakobson student living in Stockholm. The plan was for Jangfeldt to set up a publishing house for Russian literature, Gileia, as a cover for getting Khardzhiev out of the country, using money from the sale of artworks belonging to Khardzhiev, which he was to send from Russia to Sweden. According to a piece of correspondence dated August 28, 1977, four works by Malevich were sent to Jangfeldt: *Suprematism with Micro-crossing Elements* (79 x 79 cm), *Elongated Square/Ochre* (79 x 70.5 cm), *White on Black/White Square* (79 x 79 cm), and *Black Cross* (79 x 79 cm). While Khardzhiev's bid for emigration failed at that time, the paintings were never returned to him. In this same piece of correspondence, Khardzhiev gave power of attorney to a Dr. Rosemaire Ziegler of

Vienna, either to collect the money from the sale of the works or to arrange for their return to him. She was apparently unsuccessful in either regard. *Black Cross* (1915, p. 121) eventually ended up in the collection of the Musée National d'Art Moderne, Paris, in 1978 via Swedish dealer William Aronowitsch, who was assisted by legal counsel Tor Stenholm, whose wife was Stockholm's chief prosecutor at the time. I visited with Aronowitsch, Jakobson, and Stenholm in February 2001 to ascertain the whereabouts of the other three pictures, which are allegedly in the possession of a private collector in Stockholm. However, they declined to discuss the matter further. For correspondence and documents related to this episode, see Hella Rottenberg, *Meesters, marodeurs. De lotgevallen van de collectie-Chardzhiev* (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Jan Mets, 1999). In some of his letters to Jakobson, Khardzhiev condemned Jangfeldt for deceiving him, referring to the episode as "the theft of the century."

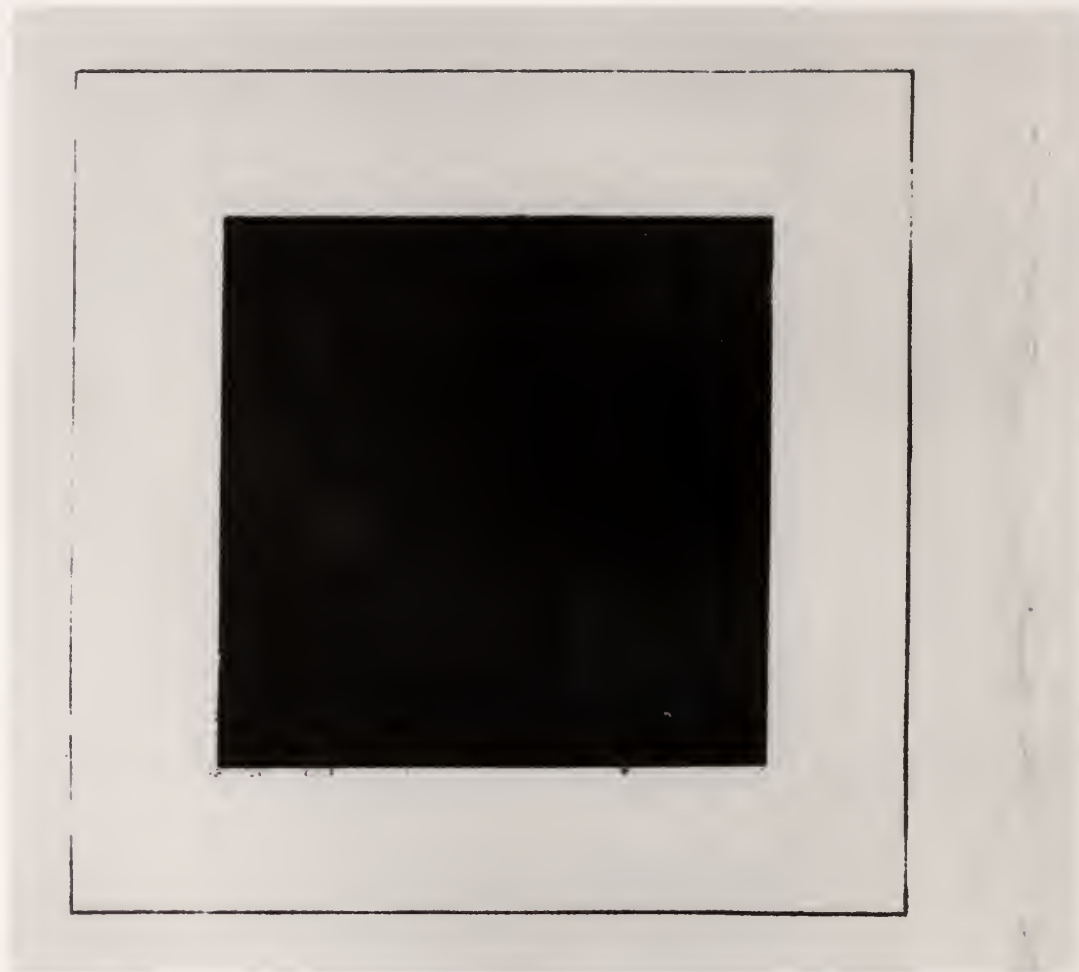
31 Khardzhiev was unable to export his entire collection of books, documents, manuscripts, and artworks from Russia, and the holdings are now divided between the Khardzhiev-Chaga Cultural Foundation in Amsterdam and RGALI (the Russian State Archive of Literature and Art) in Moscow. See John E. Bowlt and Mark Konecny, eds., *A Legacy Regained: Nikolai Khardzhiev and the Russian Avant-Garde* (St. Petersburg: Palace Editions, 2002), which includes an excellent selection and translation of documentary materials as well as essays placing this new information in context.

32 Malevich letter to Mikhail Matushin, June 1913, cited in Evgenii Kovtun, "Kazimir Malevich: His Creative Path," in *Kazimir Malevich, 1878–1935*, exh. cat. (Leningrad: State Russian Museum, Moscow: State Tretyakov Gallery, and Amsterdam: Stedelijk Museum, 1988), p. 154.

33 The first version, from 1915, is in the collection of the State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow, the second, from ca. 1923, is in the State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg, the third, from 1929, is also in the Tretyakov, and the fourth, from the 1930s, is in the State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg.

34 The second painting is in the collection of the State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.

35 See *In Malevich's Circle: Confederates, Students, Followers in Russia, 1920s–1950s*, exh. cat. (St. Petersburg: State Russian Museum, 2000).



PAGE FROM KAZIMIR MALEVICH, *SUPREMATISM 34 DRAWINGS*
(VITEBSK: UNOVIS, 1920)

**MALEVICH, PAINTING, AND WRITING:
ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF A SUPREMATIST
PHILOSOPHY**

In a passage from his famous lithographed pamphlet *Suprematism: 34 risunka* (*Suprematism: 34 Drawings*, dated December 15, 1920, and written and published in Vitebsk),¹ Kazimir Malevich, founder of the most radical abstraction to emerge from the historic European avant-garde of 1910–20, sets forth the relationship between pictorial practice and philosophical and/or theoretical writing: “The white square that I painted made possible analyzing it and writing a pamphlet on the ‘pure act.’² The black square defined the economy that I introduced as the fifth measure in art. The question of economy became the main vantage point from which I examine all the creations of the world of things (which is my main work) no longer with a brush, but a pen. As a result, it seems as if it is not possible to obtain with the brush what can be obtained with the pen. The brush is tattered, and can obtain nothing in the twists and turns of the mind; the pen is sharper.” At the end of this short text, he states: “I myself have retreated into the domain of thought, which is new to me, and insofar as is possible, I will set forth what I espy in the infinite space of the human skull.”³

FIRST COMMENTARY

Malevich gives a chronological and logical order to theory and practice, with theory following after the created work. Of course, the artist is constantly thinking while creating: the act of thinking and the act of making are inextricably linked in Suprematist art. For all that, Suprematist painting is not philosophical painting, for this would situate it in illusionism. Rather, it is *painting in philosophical action*. When Malevich writes, "This hard, cold, humorless system is set in motion by philosophical thought,"⁴ or, "In one of its stages, Suprematism has a purely philosophical movement, a movement of cognition through color,"⁵ he means that the pictorial and the philosophical (the noetic) come together in a single act, an act that clearly reveals *the world as the objectless (mir kak bespredmetnost)*.

When he ventures into the "domain of thought" and begins to write, Malevich disassociates these two indivisible stages of creative work; he looks into the act of the creative mind, into the noetic act that coincides with the intuitive act of creation. The painter of the 1915 *Black Square* is clear on the subject:

The Suprematist stage as a new circumstance showed me that three stages occurred within its prism, one of color and two stages distinguished by the absence of color—black and white—in accordance with the forms of the three squares. This was accomplished intuitively [*stikhiino*], without regard for the reason of their meaning, on which I am attempting to shed light today. I established ... my Suprematist line and the line of life in general as energy, and I found their similarity to a graph on the movement of color. Three stages were elucidated in Suprematism: color, black, and white, which made it possible for me to build a graph and to elucidate the future in the white square, in terms of a new white period in the construction of the world of objectless Suprematism.⁶

The painter Anna Leporskaia, who was very close to Malevich from the late 1920s to his death in 1935, emphasized the spontaneous, instinctive, even unexpected character of the emergence of *Black Square*. She reports that the painter "did not know, did not understand what exactly constituted the black square. He realized that this was such an important event in his artistic career that for a whole week (so he himself related) he could neither drink nor eat nor sleep."⁷

SECOND COMMENTARY

With regard to the "brush" and the "pen," Malevich tells us that the former is "tattered, and can obtain nothing in the twists and turns of the mind" and that the latter is "sharper." In saying that the pen, which writes and transcribes thought, goes to the innermost depths of the world's authenticity, the painter is also implying that the brush and the pen search for the same thing: the authentic living world, the rhythms of universal excitement, the objectless world, a nonfigurative God. Writing and art, pen and brush therefore say the same thing. They have identical, *if not similar*, sites. Because they complement each other in their search, saying the same thing in different ways, writing and art are, in the best and special cases, in a state of dialogue, colloquium, explanation—just as we say "we'll talk it through."

For Malevich, therefore, writing is necessary to understanding his own creation. Two aspects coexist in his writings: the development of a thought on being, on *what is*, an ontology; and an explanation, according to this ontology, of Suprematism as the outcome of a pictorial process that began with Paul Cézanne. Malevich's texts thus present us with both an original philosophy—several

theorists, in particular the French philosopher Emmanuel Martineau,⁸ have been able to place it within the history of Western philosophy—and an account of the different stages and meaning of Suprematism.

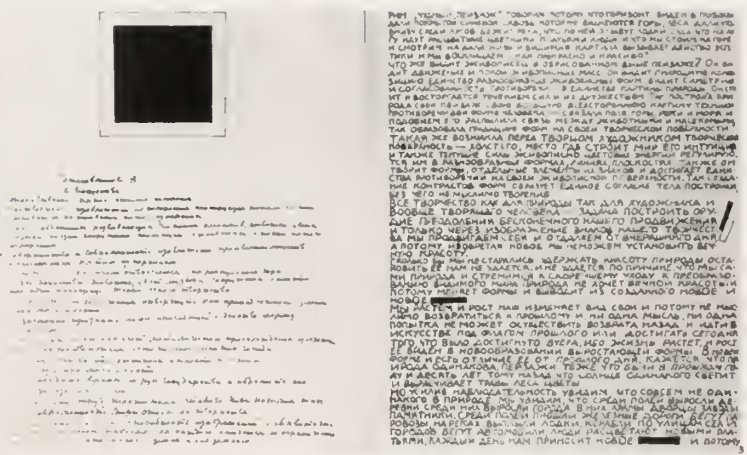
The case of Malevich is unique in the history of art because he was both a great painter and a great thinker. Many painters from Leonardo da Vinci to Vasily Kandinsky have left their philosophical thoughts, but Malevich created an ontological system, a reflection on beings (*das Seiende*), referred to in his writings as “phenomena” (*iavlenie*), “circumstances” (*obstoiateľstva*), “distinctions” (*otlichiiia*), “differences” (*razlichiiia*), and “being” (*bytie*).

“Professional philosophers” have always been suspicious of painters who write. A great mind who displayed this skepticism was the philosopher-medievalist Étienne Gilson, who writes:

Being a painter doesn't prevent the artist from also being a writer, but he won't be able to practice both at the same time. Real painters are well aware that they must choose between painting, writing, or speaking.⁹

Given that Malevich stopped painting almost entirely when he retreated into the “domain of thought” between 1920 and 1924, Gilson's comments appear to substantiate criticisms leveled at Martineau and myself some years ago that claimed we had forgotten Malevich was a painter when we took the plunge into his writings. Gilson also writes:

When they write or talk about their art, painters have as much difficulty as other men have in expressing themselves on a subject that is, in essence, foreign to language. They have the great advantage of knowing what they are trying to talk about, but even in the best cases—Constable, Delacroix, or Fromentin, for example—a painter who writes is a writer, not a painter. The worst cases are those in which, instead of speaking about



SPREAD FROM KAZIMIR MALEVICH "ON NEW SYSTEMS IN ART" (VITEBSK 1919)

experience, the painter begins to philosophize. Most often, he then only echoes philosophical notions that have become banal, and in this framework, he endeavors to uphold his personal experience rather than redefine these notions to adapt them to himself.¹⁰

Yet Malevich proves Gilson's statement wrong. Martineau, a Gilson student in spirit, takes up the question of "writing and art" where Gilson left off. He raises the problem of the relationship between Malevich's ontology and phenomenology. Martineau does not say "Malevich-philosopher" or "Malevich's philosophy"; he says, "Malevich and philosophy," denoting the dialogue that the writing painter has with an entire tradition of philosophy from its origins, which he found in the "twists and turns of the mind," without any philosophy training to prepare him.

Martineau, who, in 1977, only had access to a part of the Malevich's writings (since only a portion of them had been translated from Russian by this time), asserts:

The complete work of Malevich—writing and painting—has the unique property in which, for the first time since painters have borne a relationship to literature, *writing is of equal importance, strictly equal to painting—even to the extent that the autonomy of the latter, without having to be naturally called into question, is essentially questionable.*¹¹

IS MALEVICH A BAD WRITER?

To most of Malevich's contemporaries, the language in *Bog ne skinut: Iskustvo, Tserkov, Fabrika* (*God Is Not Cast Down: Art, Church, Factory*, 1922) may have seemed muddled, barely intelligible, incorrect, without beginning or end. Indeed, some years earlier, Alexandre Benois, the leader of the World of Art movement, had dismissed the pamphlet distributed by Malevich at *Posledniaia*

futuristicheskaia vystavka kartin, "0.10" (nul-desat) (*The Last Futurist Exhibition of Paintings, "0.10" [Zero-Ten]*) in Petrograd at the end of 1915 (along with pamphlets by Ivan Puni, Ksenia Boguslavskaja, Mikhail Menkov, and Ivan Kliun) as "not worth the paper it's written on [*bumazhonka*]." He likened these artists, Malevich in particular, to the devils of Gergesenes from the Gospel according to Matthew (Matthew 8:28–34), and suggested that, like them, they "go away into a herd of swine and disappear into the depths of the sea!"¹² The same attacks were voiced in response to *God Is Not Cast Down*, distributed in Vitebsk. Boris Arvatov, a Communist critic and champion of Productivist Art, reviled the abstruse language in Malevich's treatise, calling it "some kind of pathological ventriloquy and degenerate madness [*vyrozhdentsa*], by someone who imagines himself a prophet."¹³ The Marxist critic Sergei Isakov, who was among those who had defended Vladimir Tatlin's counter-reliefs in 1915, denounced the "fruitless philosophy of the Absolute [*nedogovorenniaia filosofiiia Absoliuta*]" that had come forth from the "grossly muddled pamphlet [*vesma sumburnaia knizhechka*] *God Is Not Cast Down*."¹⁴

We could list further examples that simply note the nonnormative character of Malevich's language. Some are indignant about his texts and reject them as nothing more than strings of meaningless sentences. Translations often tone down his writing, "fix it," or "straighten it out."¹⁵ As a result, Malevich is not particularly accessible. Many give up on close study of the texts and stop at an impression of chaos and muddle; they refuse to admit value in philosophical Suprematism and focus only on Malevich's undeniable genius as a painter. Others make do with revealing the so-called astructural and contradictory character of the

author's thought in, for example, *Suprematism: Mir kak bespredmetnost ili vechnyi pokoj* (*Suprematism: The World as the Objectless or Eternal Rest*, early 1920s).

"What a shame it is that I am not a writer," Malevich wrote to the wife of the literary critic and thinker Mikhail Gershenzon.¹⁶ In fact, the kind of writer he was referring to is the man of letters whose profession it is to write. It is true that Malevich's style often includes anacoluthon (syntactical inconsistency) and that his syntax is difficult; and yet, when we read this very letter, we discover the author's narrative talent, his powerful images and humor. This makes us think that his confession of not being a writer is a case of *paralepsis*.

The literary critic Nikolai Khardzhiev reports that Malevich told him: "I don't like redoing and repeating what has already been written. It bores me to death! I write something else. But I write poorly. I'll never learn."¹⁷ Khardzhiev comments:

The energy of his "heavy style" was appreciated by few. Even one of Malevich's closest students, El Lissitzky, who translated his articles into German, thought that his "grammar [was] completely the wrong way round." And yet Malevich had the *remarkable quality of being able to capture the process of living thought*. He wrote with extraordinary speed and practically without making changes.¹⁸

This "remarkable quality of being able to capture the process of living thought" is the fundamental quality of Malevich's writing. Like a poet's writing, it is both "pure" and "naked," stirred by the "tempest of rhythm."¹⁹ It is enlivened by the same impetuous movements of the painter, whose "mind burns" and in whom blaze "rays that come from the colors of nature."²⁰

Fire is a frequent image in Malevich's thought. On the "historial" path beautifully traced by Jacques Derrida from

Hölderlin to Heidegger (through Trakl), on the path of those who are impassioned, who set *themselves* afire,²¹ stands Malevich:

"Excitement [i.e., the spirit of the sensation of being objectless] is a cosmic flame that lives on that which is objectless."²² Elsewhere Malevich writes:

Excitement, like molten copper in a blast furnace, seethes in a state that is purely objectless. Excitement-combustion is the supreme white force that sets thought into motion. Excitement is like the flame of a volcano that flickers within a human being without the goal of meaning. A human being is like a volcano of excitements whereas thought is concerned with perfections.²³

In a very Nietzschean passage from an unpublished 1923 essay, Malevich writes:

Marinetti and I spent our childhood and youth at the summit of Mount Etna; we only spoke to the devils that appeared in Etna's smoke. We were mystics then, but the devils always tempted us with materialist science and proved that art had to be just as materialist. It is true that I was a bit slow to understand, but Marinetti, well, he took this idea to heart and wrote a manifesto that praised factory chimneys and everything produced inside factories.²⁴

It is interesting to note that the founder of Suprematism named Pablo Picasso and Filippo Tommaso Marinetti as



the two pillars, the two "prisms," of the new art of the twentieth century.²⁵ The influence of Marinetti on Malevich's style and expression is undeniable. The writings of both have the same tone, turns of phrase, and lexicon. Malevich adopted Marinetti's Futurist exclamatory rhetoric, his sometimes lampoonish satirical manner, and his aphoristic habits, each clause rapping out the discourse like a command, a slogan.²⁶

In Malevich's work, Marinetti's influence was combined with the influence of Russian "beyondsense" (*zaum*) poetics, that of Velimir Khlebnikov and Aleksei Kruchenykh in particular, with both of whom Malevich was very close.²⁷ There is also a specific linguistic substratum in his literary work: Polish and especially Ukrainian expressions are often used to embellish a hyperbolic and baroque aesthetic.

Marinetti's influence on the author of *God Is Not Cast Down* extended beyond the level of style and form, to the very inspiration that fills the painter's prose, to the realm of ideas: antiacademicism; antihedonism; antihumanism; the study of war; the question of economy, partially; the importance of white (which Marinetti had inherited from Stéphane Mallarmé); intuition that goes against reason; "geometric and mechanical splendor."²⁸ But it is clear that all that Malevich borrows, consciously or unconsciously, is integrated into an entirely new philosophy, one informed by an ontological perspective.²⁹

Elsewhere I have discussed the importance for Malevich's intellectual development of the various vague and diffuse ideas that formed the zeitgeist of the early twentieth century before World War I: religious socialism, the God-seekers and the God-builders, the empirical criticism of Richard Avenarius and Ernst Mach.³⁰ Special mention must, however, be made of *Tertium Organum*

(1911) by the theosophist Petr Ouspensky, which was read by the entire Russian avant-garde. We find a similar lexicon, even similar thought, in Malevich's texts (though he was ironical about studies of the "new man," in particular those that revolved around India, which, he wrote, "always seem to end with a good cleansing of the stomach"³¹). *Tertium Organum*, which contains a great number of extracts from philosophical texts from around the world, gave Malevich access to Eleatics, Plato, Plotinus, Clement of Alexandria, Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, Jacob Boehme, Kant, and Hindu and Chinese texts, all of which have points in common with Suprematist thought. I have also discussed elsewhere the importance of Malevich's dialogue with Gershenzon,³² who encouraged him to write, and the impact that Gershenzon's book *Troistvennyi obraz sovershenstva* (*The Triple Image of Perfection*, 1918) had on his thinking.³³ Nevertheless, as Martineau has justly underscored, all these various influences, whether religious, political, cosmogonical, or other, only allow us "better to reveal in Malevich, by contrast, the secret work of the question of being."³⁴

We could discuss the Nietzschean thought and rhetoric in *Suprematism: The World as the Objectless or Eternal Rest*. The word "Suprematism" is itself Nietzschean, and we also find shades of Zarathustra when Malevich writes, for example:

The ascent to the peaks of objectless art is arduous, painful. . . .
And yet it brings happiness. The familiar retreats little by little. . . .
The contours of the world of objects fade more with every moment; and the same thing continues in the world of figurative notions—everything that we loved and all from which we lived, becomes invisible.³⁵

We could cite many other references, too, but, as the late

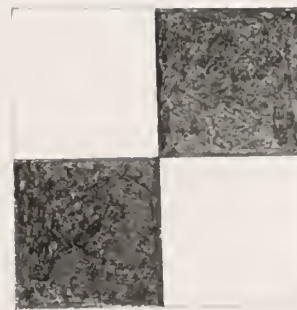
Czech art historian Jiri Padrta emphasized, Malevich was able to transform

all this knowledge into the wild flame of his vision of the objectless world, which is expressed in the glow of his nonfigurative art. One thing is for certain: in no way does it simply involve a fairly original compilation of several borrowed systems, nor is it an impressive account of a body of knowledge, of the kind that occasionally emerged between Antiquity and the Enlightenment; and it certainly is not a simple replication of something, whether we want to consider it faithful or whether we allow for so-called distortion of genius (anything goes with untamed thought!)—there is, after all, a meticulously thought-out construct that is simultaneously being constantly shaken, a “Tower of Babel” rising to the objectless, and the author himself is at stake.³⁶

THE RECEPTION AND CHALLENGE OF SUPREMATIST THOUGHT

Those of Malevich’s texts published in Russian during his lifetime, followed in 1927 and 1962 by German translations of some of the previously unpublished manuscripts, presented Western readers—in fragments, but sufficiently—a philosophy of the objectless.³⁷ Even if this philosophy partially converged with existing philosophical movements (let us call them negative philosophies of the “Nothing”), it still formed a very personal body of thought.

First and foremost, Malevich was unique in that he gave philosophical significance to the pairing of figuration (*predmetnost*) and the objectless (*bespredmetnost*), which emerged in the theory and criticism of art of the 1910s as a way to designate a new reality—the rise of nonfiguration and abstraction. In 1919, the Polish-Ukrainian-Russian painter stated: “In mentioning the objectless [in 1913–16], I only wanted to point out clearly that Suprematism does not treat of things, objects, etc., and that’s all; the objectless, generally speaking, was beside the point.”³⁸ Thus, the



SUPREMATIST SQUARE DERIVED FROM THE SQUARE
PAGE DESIGN FOR THE NON-FIGURAL WORLD
BY MINERVA ALBERT LANGENBERG (1921)
1921, pencil on paper, 21 x 26.7 cm
Kupferstichkabinett, Offener Hof, Kunsthalle Hamburg, Hamburg

△

13
cm

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Супрематизм — это не искусство, а философия.

1918
Супрематизм — это не искусство, а философия.

SUPREMATIST ELEMENT AT THE MOMENT OF DISSOLUTION OF SENSATION (NONOBJECTIVITY). PAGE DESIGN FOR THE NONOBJECTIVE WORLD (MUNICH ALBERT LANGEN VERLAG, 1927) 1927, pencil on paper, 8¼ x 6½ inches (21 x 16.5 cm) Kupferstichkabinett, Öffentliche Kunstsammlung Basel

painter clearly distinguished between the objectless as an operative mode in the plastic arts and “the objectless, generally speaking” — that is, in a philosophical, Suprematist sense. He deliberately did not seek a different word for the philosophical objectless. Malevich could have used objectivity (*obektivnost*) and nonobjectivity (*neobektivnost*) to describe both the philosophical objectless and nonfigurative art, which he does elsewhere,³⁹ but according to my hypothesis, he did not choose to do so because “objectivity/nonobjectivity”

did not acknowledge his project, instead associating his thought with that of various other doctrines. There is almost a certain “objectivity” in Suprematism, the objectivity of the objectless, of the total absence of the object. Although the painter denies objectivity in terms of picturing an object since “the human being cannot picture anything,”⁴⁰ and although the traditional conflict in philosophy between subject and object means nothing to him, it is still the case that all is one, that if there is nothing outside, then *nothing* is what is. It is this nothing that Suprematism wants to release from the weight of the figurative (i.e., of objects [*predmetnyi*]). This is precisely the

crux of the painter’s philosophical thought: the impossibility of being able to picture, to picture oneself, to represent, to represent oneself. The “Suprematist mirror” (*Suprematicheskoe zerkalo*) is the zero, “the zero as the ring of transfiguration of all that is with-object [*predmetnoe*] into the objectless [*bespredmetnoe*].”⁴¹ It is from zero, in zero, that the true movement of being begins. None of the traditional philosophical oppositions are appropriate in this case, which is why Malevich used vocabulary from the plastic arts in his reflections on being. Suprematism is not a philosophy of negation in a dialectical process; it is a philosophy of “without,” of absence.

Even before many of Malevich’s little-known texts had been reprinted in Russian (in particular, those originally published in the Moscow newspaper *Anarkhiia* (*Anarchy*) in 1918),⁴² and even before the publication of some of his texts,⁴³ important writings by Malevich existed in German, English, and French translation.⁴⁴ The philosophical import of his writings continued to be confirmed as previously unpublished texts came out. Martineau, as mentioned earlier, was the first to include Malevich’s writings in a historicity (*Geschichtlichkeit*)—that is, among the movements of thought since the dawn of philosophy⁴⁵—so let us summarize, very generally, his interpretation of Suprematist writings. First and foremost, Martineau firmly asserts that the statements and affirmations made by the founder of Suprematism “are philosophical and are such in rigorous and eminent fashion.”⁴⁶ There is a “silent and unconscious dialogue between phenomenology and Suprematism.”⁴⁷ It is the experience of art that led Malevich to a *new abstraction*, that of the retreat (*Entzug*) of things toward the invisible zone of their provenance, from which is revealed “the essence of unchanging nature

in all of its changing phenomena."⁴⁸ The "pictorial mission" of Suprematism is to "allow 'nature' to 'proceed' rhythmically to the diversity of its 'states' and allow each of these 'states,' through the miracle of *color* and technique, to reincarnate into new *things* that are nonobjective and restful in their 'spirit,' whether statically or dynamically."⁴⁹ For Martineau, Suprematism is "transmetaphysical thought"⁵⁰ that seeks a new relationship with God: "Where Nietzsche leaves the overman without a world, and leaves his new relationship to the divine vague, Malevich is able to develop thought about the things of the world [*mondanéité*] of the overman, including a new figure of God."⁵¹ Neither pictorial Suprematism nor Suprematist philosophy is iconoclastic or nihilist. Malevich's iconoclasm "is only brought to bear on the *imago* and leaves intact . . . the domain of the icon as 'similitude' that is rigorously nonimitative";⁵² "pictorial Suprematism is the attempt to restore iconicity in art, and the attempt in philosophy . . . to reestablish its rights to 'being.'"⁵³ Above all, Martineau insists on Malevich's pictorial thought as being a lesson in freedom, in "the liberation of liberty": "Anyone who today asks that thought be what it always was, that is, the sole instrument of liberation that exists on earth and above, must read Malevich as one of the greatest spiritual and political teachers of the century."⁵⁴

Martineau's appraisal of Malevich, like my own and like that of all who have discerned ontological thought about the spiritual (not spiritualism!) in Malevich's work, countered dominant thought of the 1970s and 1980s, which adopted the "zero of forms" that Suprematism proclaimed in 1915, but only saw a "zero stage." For Malevich, rendering forms as zero is but a springboard for going beyond zero, into the regions of a liberated Nothing.

This "beyond" is not transcendental in the traditional sense, but rather is immersed in the objectless world, the only reality.

At this point, it is necessary to cite a long extract from a letter written by Malevich to Gershenzon on April 11, 1920—that is, precisely at the time that he began his great philosophical work. This letter, unpublished until 2000, confirms (if that were necessary) the painter's fundamental antimaterialism and his ambition to turn pictorial and philosophical Suprematism into a religion intended to succeed all religions—a new religion of the spirit, a "religion of the pure act":

I no longer consider Suprematism like a painter or like a form that I took out from a dark skull. I stand before it like an outsider contemplating a phenomenon. For many years I was concerned with my movement in colors, leaving the religion of the spirit aside, and twenty-five years have passed, and now I have returned or rather I have entered into the religious World; I do not know why it happened so. I visit churches, look at the saints and the entire spiritual world in action, and now I see in myself, and perhaps in the world as a whole, that the time is coming for a change of religions. I have seen that just as painting has moved toward its pure form of the act, so too the World of religions is moving toward the religion of the Pure act; all the saints and prophets were impelled by this very act, but were not able to realize it, blocked as they were by reason, which sees goal and meaning in everything, and every act of the religious World smashed against these two walls of the rational fence.

Malevich's texts allow us to apprehend the significance of his pictorial act. When Malevich was filled with a real rage to write, it was because he was simultaneously defending his pictorial system and had the ontological need to formulate in words that which he was formulating, silently, through the pictorial. Malevich's writing brings

us into the very twists and turns of creation in which “painting-writing-thinking-being” are identical, if not similar, positions. His writing is the fruit of reflection that stems from a work that is already done. Both defense and illustration of objectless art, it gives us the philosophical version of a pictorial practice. Roger de Piles said in 1699: “It is therefore not enough to learn the Author of a Picture, to know the movement of the Brush, if we do not penetrate into that of the Spirit.” Malevich is not a professional philosopher-theologian. He is a painter who expressed discursively (using the verbal tools provided by his cultural environment) the philosophical necessity of pictorial art. What is extraordinary, what makes Malevich a unique figure in the universal history of the arts, is that he was not a painter-philosopher, but a great painter and a great philosopher who was able to raise in philosophical, often idiolectal terms, on par with the greats, *the question of the truth of being*.

Translated from the French by Molly Stevens.

Notes

I wish to thank John Malmstad for his assistance, in particular for reviewing the English translations of Malevich's writings from the original Russian

1 Malevich, *Suprematizm: 34 risunka*, in *Kazimir Malevich: Sobranie sochinenii v piati tomakh*, vol. 1 (Moscow: Gileia, 1995), pp. 185–207

2 There are no pamphlets with this title, but all the texts in Malevich's *magnum opus*, *Suprematizm: Mir kak bespredmetnost ili vechnyi pokoi*, including the pamphlet *Bog ne skinut Iskusstvo*, *Tserkov, Fabrika*, reflect on the “act of pure white.” See *Kazimir Malevich: Sobranie sochinenii v piati tomakh*, vol. 3 (Moscow: Gileia, 2000)

Bespredmetnost (as in the title *Suprematizm: Mir kak bespredmetnost ili vechnyi pokoi*) is usually rendered as “nonobjectivity” or “nonobjectivism,” but, for reasons that I will explain, I prefer “the objectless.”

3 Malevich, *Suprematizm: 34 risunka*, p. 189.

4 Malevich, “Suprematizm” (1919), in *Kazimir Malevich: Sobranie sochinenii v piati tomakh*, vol. 1, p. 151.

5 Ibid.

6 Malevich, “K II chasti Suprematizm kak bespredmetnost, ∞, otdyx” (1920), handwritten notebook, private archive, St. Petersburg, p. 43

7 Anna Leporskaia, “Anfang und Ende der figurativen Malerei und der Suprematismus/The Beginning and the End of Figurative Painting and Suprematism,” in *Kasimir Malevitsch: Zum 100. Geburtstag*, exh. cat. (Cologne: Galerie Gmurzynska, 1978), p. 65.

8 See Emmanuel Martineau, *Malévitch et la philosophie* (Lausanne: L'Age d'Homme, 1977)

9 Etienne Gilson, *Peinture et Réalité* (Paris: Vrin, 1972), p. 290.

10 Ibid., p. 298.

11 Martineau, *Malévitch et la philosophie*, p. 78.

12 Alexandre Benois, “Poslednaia futuristsheskaia vystavka,” speech, January 9 [21], 1916, p. 3

13 Boris Arvatov, in *Pechat i revoliutsiia*, no. 7 (1922), pp. 343–44.

14 Sergei Isakov, “Tserkov i khudozhnik,” *Zhizn iskusstva*, no. 14 (April 10, 1923), p. 20. Malevich responded to this article in “Vanka-vstanka,” *Zhizn iskusstva*, no. 21 (May 29, 1923), pp. 15–16.

15 The most flagrant examples are *Die gegenstandslose Welt* (Munich: Albert Langen, 1927) and *Suprematismus. Die gegenstandslose Welt* (Cologne: DuMont Schauberg, 1962). While respecting the spirit of Malevich's thought overall, these German translations of his manuscripts give them a tone that resembles more German *Naturphilosophie* than Futurist exclamatory rhetoric

16 Malevich, letter to Mariia Gershenzon, December 28, 1919, in *Kazimir Malevich: Sobranie sochinenii v piati tomakh*, vol. 3, p. 375.

17 Nikolai Khardzhiev, “Vmesto predislovia,” in *K istorii russkogo avangarda* (Stockholm: Gileia, 1976), p. 101

18 Ibid. Italics added

19 Malevich, “O poezia,” in *Kazimir Malevich: Sobranie sochinenii v piati tomakh*, vol. 1, p. 142.

20 Ibid., pp. 142–43

21 See Jacques Derrida, *Of Spirit: Heidegger and the Question* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), pp. 83–98

22 Malevich, *Bog ne skinut*, p. 238.

23 Malevich, *Suprematizm: Mir kak bespredmetnost ili vechnyi pokoi*, pp. 219–20. On excitement as *primum movens* and on Mikhail Gershenzon's influence with regard to the question of “perfections,” see my foreword and preface, “Une esthétique de l'abîme,” in Malevich, *Écrits I: De Cézanne au Suprématisme* (Lausanne: L'Age d'Homme, 1974, 1993), p. 7; translated into English as “An Approach to the Writings of Malevich,” *Soviet Union/Union Soviétique* 5, no. 2 (1978), pp. 225–40.

- 24 Cited by Evgenii Kovtun as an epigraph to his article "‘Les mots en liberté’ de Marinetti et la ‘transmentalité (zaum) des futuristes russes,'" in *Présence de Marinetti* (Lausanne: L’Age d’Homme, 1982), p. 234
25. Malevich defended Marinetti against Russian critics in the 1910s and revolutionary 1920s. See Jean-Claude Marcadé, "Marinetti et Malévitch," in *Présence de Marinetti*, pp. 256–57
26. The principle writings of Marinetti and of the Italian Futurists were published in Russian mainly in 1913–14. See Cesare G. De Michelis, *Il futurismo italiano in Russia, 1909–1929* (Bari: De Donato, 1973), p. 269
27. See Dora Vallier, "Malévitch et le modèle linguistique," *Critique*, March 1975, pp. 284–96, and Rainer Crone, "Zum Suprematismus. Kazimir Malevich, Velimir Chlebnikov und Nikolai Lobačevskij," *Wallraf-Richartz-Jahrbuch*, vol. 40 (1978), pp. 129–62, "À Propos de la signification de la *Gegenstandslosigkeit* chez Malévitch et son rapport à la théorie poétique de Khlebnikov," in *Malévitch: Cahier I* (Lausanne: L’Age d’Homme, 1983), pp. 45–75, and *Kazimir Malevich: The Climax of Disclosure* (Munich: Prestel, 1991), pp. 89ff
28. This last phrase is from Marinetti’s manifesto "La Splendeur géométrique et mécanique et la sensibilité numérique" (1914), in Giovanni Lista, *Futurisme Manifestes. Documents. Proclamations* (Lausanne: L’Age d’Homme, 1973), pp. 147–52
29. On the subject of the similarities and differences between Marinetti and Malevich, see my "Marinetti et Malévitch," pp. 250–65
30. See my "Une esthétique de l’abîme!" "An Approach to the Writings of Malevich"
31. Malevich, letter to Alexandre Benois, May 1916, in *Kazimir Malevich v russkom muzee* (St. Petersburg: Palace Editions, 2000), p. 393.
32. See my "Une esthétique de l’abîme," pp. 22–23, "An Approach to the Writings of Malevich," pp. 236–37
33. The correspondence between Malevich and Gershenzon from 1918 to 1924 is found in *Kazimir Malevich: Sobranie sochinenii v piati tomakh*, vol. 3, pp. 327–53.
34. Martineau, *Malevitch et la philosophie*, p. 102
35. Malevich, "Suprematizm" (1922), quoted in Jean-Claude Marcadé, *Malévitch* (Paris: Casterman, 1990), p. 161
36. Jiri Padrta, "Le monde en tant que sans-objet ou le repos éternel. Essai sur la précarité d’un projet humaniste," in *Malévitch: Cahier I*, pp. 176–77
37. *Die gegenstandslose Welt and Suprematismus. Die gegenstandslose Welt* (see n. 15) remained the only translations of Malevich’s writings until 1968, when the first English translation appeared (Malevich, *Essays on Art*, vol. 1 [Copenhagen: Borgen, 1968])
38. Malevich, "Suprematizm" (1919), p. 150
39. See Malevich, "O subektivnom i o obektivnom v iskusstve i voobshche," in Malevich, *Zhivopis. Teoriia* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1993), pp. 237–50.
40. Malevich, *Bog ne skinut*, p. 241
41. Malevich, *Suprematizm: Mir kak bespredmetnost ili vechnyi pokoi*, p. 84 "Suprematicheskoe zerkalo" is the title of a 1923 manifesto by Malevich, in *Kazimir Malevich: Sobranie sochinenii v piati tomakh*, vol. 1, p. 273
42. Eleven articles from *Anarkhiia*, edited by Andrei D. Sarabianov, appear in *Kazimir Malevich. Sobranie sochinenii v piati tomakh*, vol. 3, pp. 75–125.
43. Among the most important of these are *Il45. Vvedenie v teoriu pribavochnogo élementa v zhivopisi*, ed. Stephan Von Wiese (Mayence: Florian Kupferberg, 1980), *A Targyneikuli vilag* (in Hungarian), trans. Eva Forgacs (Budapest: Corvina Kiado, 1986), and texts from the Malevich Archive, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, in Malevich, *Zhivopis. Teoriia*, pp. 237–380, and in *Kazimir Malevich: Sobranie sochinenii v piati tomakh*, vol. 3.
44. Among the most important are German, *Die gegenstandslose Welt and Suprematismus. Die gegenstandslose Welt* (see n. 15), in English, the four volumes of *Essays on Art*, ed. Troels Andersen (Copenhagen: Borgen, 1968–78), and in French, the four volumes of *Écrits*, ed. Jean-Claude Marcadé (Lausanne: L’Age d’Homme, 1974–94), and *Malévitch Écrits*, ed. Andrei Nakov (Paris: Le Champ Libre, 1975)
45. Martineau’s *Malévitch et la philosophie* is complemented by his highly thoughtful articles that delve into various aspects of Suprematist philosophy "Une philosophie des ‘Suprema,'" in *Suprematisme*, exh. cat. (Paris: Galerie Jean Chauvelin, 1977), in French and English, "Préface" to the French translations of *Bog ne skinut* and "Vanka-vstanka," in Malevich, *Écrits // Le miroir suprématisiste* (Lausanne: L’Age d’Homme, 1977, 1993); and "Malévitch et l’énigme ‘cubiste’ 36 propositions en marge *Des nouveaux systèmes en art*," in *Malévitch. Actes du Colloque international tenu au Centre Georges Pompidou* (Lausanne: L’Age d’Homme, 1979), pp. 59–77
46. Martineau, *Malévitch et la philosophie*, p. 121
47. Martineau, "Préface," p. 27
48. Malevich, "Suprematicheskoe zerkalo," p. 273.
49. Martineau, "Une philosophie des ‘Suprema,'" p. 130.
50. Martineau, "Préface," p. 27
51. *Ibid.*, p. 26.
52. *Ibid.*, p. 33
53. Martineau, "Malévitch et l’énigme ‘cubiste,'" p. 63
54. Martineau, *Malevitch et la philosophie*, p. 224
55. See *Kazimir Malevich: Sobranie sochinenii v piati tomakh*, vol. 3, p. 341



MIKHAIL MATIUSHIN, KAZIMIR MALEVICH, AND
ALEKSEI KRUCHENYKH IN UUSIKIRKKO, JULY 1913
State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg

**THE SUPREMUS "LABORATORY-HOUSE":
RECONSTRUCTING THE JOURNAL**

Malevich first mentioned the idea of a new journal in May 1915, long before he had invented the term "Suprematism"; at this time, the title of the journal was to be *Nul* [Zero]. This first mention coincided chronologically with Malevich's initial quest to develop a new theory of nonobjective art that would "go beyond zero."¹ "That which was done unconsciously is now bearing extraordinary fruit," Malevich wrote to Mikhail Matiushin on May 27, 1915, referring back to his notorious drawing for the curtain of the opera *Pobeda nad solntsem* (*Victory over the Sun*, 1913), retrospectively rationalizing it as a prototype of Suprematism, an anticipation of his *Black Square* (1915).² Malevich carefully concealed his new ideas from his rivals, especially Ivan Puni (Jean Pougny), but he shared them with old friends who had been tried and tested in collaboration: Aleksei Kruchenykh spent the summer of 1915 working in a room he rented from Malevich at his dacha in Kuntsevo, and both were occasionally visited there by Ivan Kliun. On May 29, Malevich shared with Matiushin his idea for a new journal and asked for his support in reuniting the old Futurist "trio" of Malevich, Matiushin, and Kruchenykh:



OLGA ROZANOVA, KSENIA BOGUSLAVSKAIA, AND KAZIMIR MALEVICH AT THE 0.10 EXHIBITION, GALERIE DOBYCHINA, PETROGRAD, 1915-16
State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg

We are planning to put out a journal and have begun to discuss the how and what of it. Since in it we intend to reduce everything to zero, we have decided to call it *Nul*. Afterward we ourselves will go beyond zero. It would be good if you could also offer some useful advice. We're pooling our resources to publish it, i.e., ten rubles apiece, and at first it will be two printer's sheets—not much, but good. It would also be good if you could come here—there's a room for you and it's quiet. ... Then things would get going even better.³

This idea of “going beyond zero” was partially reflected in Malevich, Kliun, and Kruchenykh's collection of essays *Tainye poroki akademikov* (*Secret Vices of the Academicians*), which came out that summer in Moscow. (To symbolize their orientation toward the future, the authors decided to date the work 1916 on the cover.) By early fall, Malevich had come up with the final name of the new movement, inventing the term “Suprematism,” which in his interpretation symbolized the “supremacy” of the new philosophy of nonobjective art: “Suprematism is

the most appropriate name, for it signifies supremacy,” he wrote to Matiushin.⁴ Thus was determined the name of the new group and, with it, that of the journal they were planning, *Supremus*. (It is interesting to note that Malevich emphasized the Latin etymology of this word: in his manuscripts, it rarely occurs in Cyrillic, but for the most part is written in Latin letters.)

Suprematism was introduced to the public in December 1915, at *Posledniaia futuristicheskaia vystavka kartin, “0.10” (nul-desat)* (*The Last Futurist Exhibition of Paintings, “0.10” [Zero-Ten]*) in Petrograd. The internal leadership struggle that accompanied the exhibition was not a simple one, and relationships among the members, complicated by personal ambitions, were evidently strained. In letters to Kruchenykh, Olga Rozanova conveyed the tense atmosphere in which this exhibition was prepared:

The most disagreeable thing about this entire exhibition and the artists is that everything is done underhandedly, and if before everyone only worried about themselves, now everyone is mostly concerned with doing whatever possible to hurt someone else. Thus Puni, who promised to order frames for me, purposely didn't do it so that my pictures would look ragged. They butchered the catalogue and did so many other petty things that even Malevich was forced to admit that it's disgusting. ... Malevich is something of their lackey, and the stability of the organization depends on how long he remains satisfied with his “position.”⁵

The conflict began even before the exhibition opened, when the other participants, led by the organizers of the show, Puni and Ksenia Boguslavskaia, flatly refused to use the term “Suprematism” in the catalogue. Malevich made a clever tactical move by preparing a brochure,

Ot kubizma k suprematizmu. Novyi zhivopisnyi realizm (From Cubism to Suprematism: The New Painterly Realism), printed by Matiushin for the opening as a counterpart to the catalogue, which had been “censored” by Puni. It was the first printed publication—in the form of a manifesto—to declare the new movement. “It has become crucial at any price to issue this little brochure about my work and christen it and thereby announce in advance my copyright,” Malevich wrote to Matiushin.⁶

The following September, the Suprematists’ journal was announced in the press, and at that time the list of participants was the same as that of the *0.10* exhibition. *Apollon* (nos. 9–10) ran an advertisement declaring the launch of “the monthly journal *Supremus*, which will come out in Moscow in December or January and will be devoted to painting, decorative art, music, and literature. Principal organizers and contributors include Malevich, Rozanova, Puni, [Aleksandra] Exter, Kliun, [Mikhail] Menkov.” Malevich wrote about the journal in more detail in a letter to Matiushin dated October 27, 1916: “I’ve already arranged everything. Materials are being collected, we’re all set with the typography. Send articles on new directions. The first issue is on Cubism, I’ll go on from there. I won’t appear until issue three.”⁷ However, in Malevich’s handwritten draft of an advertisement for the journal, which states that the second issue would appear in January 1917, Malevich himself is listed among the contributors:

Contributors to *Supremus* will be those who have turned aside the rays of yesterday’s sun from their faces. Kazimir Malevich, Nadezhda Udaltsova, Olga Rozanova, Ivan Kliun, Liubov Popova, Mikhail Menkov, Ivan Puni, Ksenia Boguslavskaia, Aleksei

Kruchenykh, [Vera] Pestel, Yurkevich, Nikolai Roslavets, Mikhail Matiushin, Natalia Davydova.

Owing to limited quantities of the issue, subscriptions are being accepted for *Supremus* no. 2. It will appear on January 1.

There is a note in the margin, “write Roslavets and ask which of several editions of his music should be put in the chronicle,” and after a row of dots: “No. 2 will include K. Malevich’s articles ‘A Response to the Old Day’ and ‘The Fool’s Cap of Philistine Logic.’”⁸ Malevich’s inclusion of Puni and Boguslavskaia in this list was motivated by purely practical considerations related to the financing of the journal, and when Puni’s pretensions toward a leading role (which had only grown since *0.10*) led to an unavoidable break with Malevich, publication of the journal was delayed due to a lack of sponsorship.

Conditions within the Russian art world of 1915–16 were conducive to a summing up of the avant-garde’s brief past and a consequent struggle to establish a new leadership. In late 1914, the most significant early avant-garde group in Petrograd, Union of Youth, had ceased to exist, and it had soon become clear—after Mikhail



INSTALLATION OF ORDERS BY KAZIMIR MALEVICH
AND DAY IN THE LIFE OF A WORKER BY
TRAMWAY V. VETTERER, MALEVICH (1915)
COURTESY, GALLERIA RAJ

Larionov and Natalia Goncharova, the leading figures of the Moscow art world, left Russia—that a certain period in the history of the Russian avant-garde was over. These events charged politics within the avant-garde and provoked an atmosphere in which closure occurred simultaneously with the development of new aesthetic theories. Two dominant schools emerged, organized around the two opposing poles of nonobjective art, Malevich and Vladimir Tatlin. Each school hoped to monopolize the avant-garde movement. For Malevich, then, the struggle for preeminence was being waged not only within his own group, but outside it as well. By 1916, the nucleus of his competitor Tatlin's group had taken definite shape and his own group appeared vulnerable: few of the members were well known, his own activity significantly outweighed the contribution of the other participants, and, moreover, the ambivalence of some members, who tended toward a more independent artistic position, was alarming. In 1916, Rozanova wrote to Kruchenykh:

I recently got a verbose letter from Kliunkov [Kliun]. Flattering and alarming. They are afraid that the group of [Lev] Bruni, Tatlin, and others will be significantly larger and have more success with the public than the Suprematists. He's appealing to me. He says that the Suprematists should work closely and harmoniously and so on, calls me a "rare" artist, etc.⁹

The social and political situation in the spring of 1917, when the first issue of *Supremus* was being put together after the initial delay, could not but affect Malevich's ideological strategy and the program of his journal. The events of the First Russian Revolution in February 1917, followed by the October Revolution later that year, had a complex and paradoxical impact on the social, philosophical, and aesthetic ideas of the avant-garde, and this was reflected

in *Supremus*. Power in the new institutionalized art world became a central issue:

Mass meetings have been organized in the artistic everyday of free Russia. The leaders of the meeting are the same anointed autocrats of the Academies. It was not a pretty sight: these ungrateful [artists] who have fed themselves on crumbs from their beloved monarch, painted millions of portraits of him, raised monuments to the hangmen, now crowing over the corpse of the lord, singing out their baseness.

Yesterday they tossed out rebellious young new truths, today they bow down to freedom and wear red ribbons in their button-holes. Interesting as well was the liberated "youth" that elected the "wretched" chairmen. The Suprematists were watching and marveling at the suppleness of the reincarnation.¹⁰

Under these circumstances, Malevich was the first to realize that the publication of an art journal, strictly controlled by one group, was not only an ideological but a strategic necessity. He conceived his journal as an attempt to create a social context for his art, to establish a basis for the new movement—in fact, as he wrote, "to form [his] own environment."¹¹ According to Malevich's vision, *Supremus*, apart from being a vehicle for his own artistic ambitions and assuring his leading role in the art world, was to become an original forum for experiment and discussion, something between a virtual laboratory and a fortress (he referred to his journal as a laboratory-house [*dom-laboratoria*]) for the new philosophy and theory of nonobjective art. The innovative form and artistic ideology of this journal (which Rozanova, in a letter to Matiushin, called "strictly partisan")¹²—its proclamation of Suprematism "in everything," its orientation toward the group, and its emphasis in numerous articles on the priority of "collective work" over individual art—served to enforce

Suprematist doctrine. On the draft of a title page for the journal, Malevich could not resist the temptation of adding in pencil: "A cockerel that will be heard far and wide."¹³

The metamorphosis in the title of Malevich's journal from *Nul* to *Supremus* is symbolic. While both titles convey the anarchic idea of creating the world out of "nothing" and the equation of "nothing" with "everything," the shift in emphasis from the extreme nihilism of "zero" to the utopian supreme domination ("Suprematism" meant "supremacy" to Malevich) marked a new stage in the evolution of the avant-garde. The anarchic antiutopia of alogism yielded to a quest for an objective universal law (Matiushin incisively noted "academic allusions" in the term "Suprematism"¹⁴), the assertion of the universal, and, consequently, an inescapably utopian concept of art. Strategy changed as well:

But who of us will remain to take down our youthfulness from the attic and show it to our young offspring? Who will pass on the new book of new laws from our tablets? You see, we do not yet have a book. But it is necessary, indispensable. The book is a little history of our art ... the sum of our days, *the key locking our thoughts within us*.¹⁵

This historicism and the attempt to register the genealogy of Suprematism seems very far from the earlier futuristic maximalism of Malevich and his comrades-in-arms, but it is indeed the main leitmotif of the journal, in many respects inspired by the desire to reflect or re-create the extratextual context of the movement. To some degree, *Supremus* itself has become a fragment of the historical and artistic context, without which the "aesthetic object" of the cultural legacy can no longer exist, according to Bakhtinian theory: "The work [of art] also includes its



LJUBOV POPKOVA "OTHER DESIGN FOR THE PROPOSED JOURNAL SUPREMUS" 1916 (11)

necessary extratextual context. The work, as it were, is enveloped in the music of the intonational-evaluative context in which it is understood and evaluated."¹⁶

By the middle of 1917, Puni, Boguslavskaja, Popova, and Exter were no longer members of the Suprematist group, and Malevich, Rozanova, Udaltsova, Roslavets, Kliun, Yurkevich, and Kruchenykh, among others, were announced as the principal contributors to the journal. The original structure of the journal had also changed: First of all, Malevich had asserted himself as editor in chief. Radically changing his position of not appearing until the third issue, he wrote several articles for the first issue: "Kubizm" ("Cubism"), "Futurizm" ("Futurism"), "Arkhitektura kak poshchechina zhelezo-betonu" ("Architecture as a Slap in the Face to Ferroconcrete"), and "Teatr" ("Theater"), which together were to make up the ideological core of the publication and defined the "strictly partisan" character noted by Rozanova. Although Cubism remained a theme throughout, the accent had shifted to the formation of a universal theory of nonobjectivity in painting, literature, music, architecture, sculpture, and theater, and in no small measure to its philosophical rather than practical basis. The provocative nature of a remark by one of the *Supremus* contributors (Yurkevich) was indisputably confirmed by the contents of the journal: "Suprematism is to all previously existing painting as philosophy is to journalism."¹⁷

The journal's program and contents were well defined by 1917. Rozanova described *Supremus* in a letter to Matiushin written that May: "A periodical. Strictly partisan in nature. Its program: Suprematism (in painting, sculpture, architecture, music, the new theater, and so on). Articles, a chronicle, letters, aphorisms, poetry,

reproductions of Suprematist pictures, and applied art," and articles of both a popular scholarly and a nonfictional nature.¹⁸ In a letter to Andrei Shemshurin at the end of May, Rozanova wrote that the journal was in the process of being published and that the first issue had already been composed.¹⁹ On June 18, she wrote to Matiushin that "it has already been delivered to the printer."²⁰

The first issue of the journal never did appear, in spite of the fact that all materials (not only for the first, but partly even for the second issue) were in effect ready by June 1917. In July, Rozanova wrote to Shemshurin: "These past few days there has been some fuss in connection with the publication of the journal, which is still being printed."²¹ By the end of the fall, serious differences among the Suprematists had begun to emerge, judging by a note in Udaltsova's diary of November 22:

They [a few members of the group] broke with Suprematism in an outrageous manner. Malevich suddenly went crazy, and we quarreled; if the journal comes out and we get back what we put into it, fine, but if the money is gone, horrible. . . . There was such faith in the journal; it has bogged down, but I still think it will appear.²²

On March 20, 1918, Udaltsova made the final entry in her diary concerning the unpublished journal: "How terribly disappointing that our journal has not come out."²³ It is possible that after the journal was not published the printer returned the manuscripts to Rozanova (given her position as editorial secretary), and that, after Rozanova's premature death in November 1918, some of these went to Kruchenykh and from there to Nikolai Khardzhiev. These materials are now in his archive at the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam.

Judging by the editorial notes preserved in the

Khardzhiev archive, the first issue of the journal was to be divided into four main sections: Painting (Cubism), Literature, Music, and Theater. Critical reviews, art news, and correspondence were placed at the end of the issue. Malevich's manuscript "Privetstvie suprematistam" ("Greeting to the Suprematists," the final copy of which is in Rozanova's hand on lined paper) is marked "Moscow, May 1, 1917" and labeled in red pencil "No. 1," which clearly indicates that this manifesto was to open the issue.²⁴ Next (labeled "No. 2") was to have been the general theoretical article "O bespredmetnom iskusstve" ("On Nonobjective Art") by the composer Roslavets,²⁵ which sets forth the basic philosophical sources of the new current, including Suprematism. Unfortunately, the fair copy of Malevich's text "Cubism" is missing from the archive (there is a draft,²⁶ however, and a text titled "Usta zemli i khudozhnik" ["The Mouth of the Earth and the Artist"],²⁷ which appears to be a preliminary version of "Cubism"); we can only assume that it was intended for the first section. The archive contains other manuscripts in draft form that I have determined to belong to this first issue of the journal on the basis of fragmentary information gleaned from correspondence among the contributors. This is the case with "Kubizm, futurizm, suprematizm" ("Cubism, Futurism, Suprematism") by Rozanova²⁸ and "O starom i novom v muzyke" ("On the Old and the New in Music") by Matiushin;²⁹ both essays are absent from the Khardzhiev archive, but the authorized typewritten originals are in other collections in Moscow. Malevich's programmatic article "Architecture as a Slap in the Face to Ferroconcrete"³⁰ is labeled "No. 5," and his article "Futurism"³¹ is marked "No. 7." Between these may have been Kliun's "Nonobjective Art,"³² which on the whole

reflects Malevich's thoughts on the subject. An untitled article by Udaltsova ("No. 8"), which was "to be continued in later issues of *Supremus*,"³³ addresses the same issues. The first section of the journal was to be concluded by Yurkevich's brief and rather superficial untitled essay on the distinction between Suprematism and all preceding art styles.

The literary section was to begin with Kruchenykh's "Deklaratsiia slova kak takovogo" ("The Declaration of the Word as Such," "No. 10"), originally published in 1913 and reworked in 1917 especially for *Supremus*.³⁴ From Rozanova's correspondence, we know that the remaining texts in this section were to have been Kruchenykh's play *Gly-Gly* (in which the protagonists are Velimir Khlebnikov, Vladimir Mayakovsky, Malevich, Matiushin, and Rozanova) and the *zaum* poetry collections *Balos*, by Kruchenykh and Rozanova, and *Golubye iaitsa* (*Blue Eggs*), by Kruchenykh.³⁵ Matiushin's article "On the Old and the New in Music" was to be included in the music section, presumably with other texts. Finally, in the last part of the issue would have been Malevich's essay "Theater," followed by a chronicle written in Malevich's hand, titled "Shto proiskhodelo v fevrale 1917 goda i v marte" ("What Happened in February and March 1917"), reviews, and letters by Udaltsova to Malevich ("No. 19") and to Rozanova ("No. 20") and her notes entitled "Thoughts on Art" ("No. 21").³⁶

In the text that was to open the journal, "Greeting to the Suprematists," Malevich wrote:

Many years now have become decades, but we have as before remained true to our spirit.

Burning in ever new materials we have acquired, we will move tirelessly—or like ovens, we resmelt new conclusions and form deductions.



INSTALLATION OF WORKS DESIGNED BY NATALIA DAVYDOVA, OLGA ROZANOVA, AND NADEZHDA UDALTSOVA IN THE SECOND EXHIBITION OF CONTEMPORARY DECORATIVE ART "VERBOVKA," SALON K MIKHAILOVA, MOSCOW, DECEMBER 6-19, 1917
 Courtesy Institute of Modern Russian Culture, Los Angeles

I am delighted with our meeting on the pages of the laboratory-house *Supremus*.

More than once have we met at the stations along our common road. Where we met, the bonfires burned, raising the flame of the mountain.

Jack of Diamonds, Donkey's Tail, Target, Union of Youth, Tramway V, 0.10, The Store.

These are the sites of our burned-out bonfires, our days, already past.

The aspiration to make *Supremus* an extraindividual "laboratory-house" manifested itself not only at the level of content (each article touches, in one way or another, on the problematic relationship of the individual to the school and urges artists to overcome individuality in "collective creation"), but also in the very unusual unity of such different artistic voices (Rozanova, Matiushin, Udaltsova, Roslavets) orchestrated by Malevich. Initially, it seems, the issue was to have begun with a brief joint declaration by the Suprematists, "Our Consciousness . . .,"³⁷ signed by the members of the group: "K. Malevich, N. Udaltsova, M. Menkov, L. Popova [crossed out in pencil, probably by Malevich], N. Davydova, I. Kliun, Yurkevich, N. Roslavets, M. Matiushin, Pestel, Exter [crossed out in pencil, also probably by Malevich]." (The original, in Malevich's hand, is in the Khardzhiev archive.) The declaration was to set forth the goal of the journal and its ideological position, establishing Suprematism as a new "basis for creativity," a universal synthetic style encompassing all spheres of artistic activity: "In our journal *Supremus*, we have set out to provide the contours of the idea of Suprematism, which bears within it a new idea of the artistic, musical, and poetic perception of nature and our life."

The rhetoric of this text is full of allusions to early Cubo-Futurist manifestos, and is rooted in the myth of the new art as the only means of breaking out of “the ring of yesterday into the new day.” In Malevich’s “genealogy” of Suprematism, it is Cubism that plays the most important conceptual role, a “victory over the principles of the Old Rationality of centuries of culture,” “supported on muscles of meat,” a revolutionary source that has led to the triumph of “creation”—or the creative will—over “varnished art.” While a strong sense of national identity did not prevent the Suprematists from recognizing themselves as part of the international European avant-garde, Cubism was to be present in *Supremus* only as a general concept (no names, even those of Georges Braque and Picasso, are mentioned in any of the articles) reinvented by Suprematists as the origin of the avant-garde *tradition*—a tradition that was nonetheless *revolutionary*. This was a new methodological approach, based on historical self-reflection by the avant-garde. *Supremus* was the first attempt to establish the Russian avant-garde movement as an artistic entity within its own historical development, as a dynamically evolving, self-regenerating tradition. (Malevich wrote in “Futurism” that “the new value of Futurism—speed—must not be finalized” and named the principal shortcoming of the Futurists to be their “academism,” the fact that they “stopped and tried to use old means of expression to convey the new.”)

In Malevich’s almost postmodern sensibility, he projected the Suprematist perception onto Cubism, much as in the 1920s he would deconstruct and reinvent Impressionism (or rather the concept or formula of Impressionism, which had little in common with the actual movement of the latter half of the nineteenth century).

Cubism as an aesthetic phenomenon and the practice of it (already explored by Russian artists in the years leading up to 1915) were of no interest to the Suprematists. Cubism was to appear in *Supremus* exclusively on the level of an idea, a *form*. Malevich wrote in “Futurism”:

Cubism and Futurism are the revolutionary banners of art. They are of value to museums, like the relics of the Social Revolution. Relics to which monuments should be erected in public squares. I propose creating in squares monuments to Cubism and Futurism as the weapons that defeated the old art of repetition and brought us to spontaneous creation.

Malevich praised the destruction of things in Cubism, which he believed had completely changed the reference points of art, singling out and leading to the dominance of painterly language “as such” and the study of the formal qualities of painting. “Considering Cubism the brilliant solution to our problems, being liberated from objectness, we emerge into space, color, and time. It is with these three worlds that we will explore our new tasks in following issues of *Supremus*,” he wrote in “The Mouth of the Earth and the Artist.” According to Malevich, the Suprematists took the next step in this direction by abstracting the primary elements of painterly structure, particularly color and form: “Through Cubism and Futurism, the artist burst with a convulsive movement into the freedom of pure creativity, into the study of pure painting—color. Painting is only color and form.” He continues: “Cubism is the time of art when consciousness came closest to color.” While color was not really a major issue in Cubism, it became the fundamental principle of painting for the Suprematists. In Rozanova’s “Cubism, Futurism, Suprematism” and Malevich’s articles for *Supremus*, a new concept was introduced: color-painting

(*tsvetopis*).³⁸ Malevich wrote in "Greeting to the Suprematists":

Having been transfigured in the rapids of the changing, running rings of the horizon, we have leapt beyond the boundaries of the zero of repetitions and have come face to face with color. Color and color alone touches our creative nucleus. It turns it, and the centrifugal force creates new strata of color masses, naked nonobjective peaks of facets joined together.

This exclusive concentration on the formal categories of painting allowed the artist to exceed its limitations. Already in 1915, Rozanova had professed that "objectness and nonobjectness (in painting) are not two different tendencies within a single art, but two different arts—I even think it sensible to substitute projections on a screen for paint in nonobject art."³⁹ Contained within the very notion of nonobjective art was the possibility of going beyond the bounds of easel painting. As Yurkevich wrote in his untitled manuscript for *Supremus*, "Perhaps the New Painting is not at all for easel pictures or for exhibitions. The old methods of reproducing and of viewing art are probably not suitable now. New wine demands new wineskins. This is the next urgent question."

The extant articles written for *Supremus* unquestionably indicate that Malevich originally considered his style as synthetic and universal and not bound by the borders of one or another genre or form of art. Moreover, he promoted his nonobjectivity theory as a theory of unbound "creativity" (as opposed to the "narrow" notion of "art") capable of penetrating beyond the boundaries of artistic activity to encompass the most diverse spheres of human life.

Under the direct influence of Malevich, Kruchenykh during this period became interested in the notion of

soundless poetry, intended not for reading and declamation but for purely visual perception. In the revised "Declaration of the Word as Such," Kruchenykh theorized on the mutually complementary (but not interchangeable) nature of abstract visual and auditory elements in the process of intuitive cognition: "sound in music, color in painting, and the letter in poetry (thought = insight + sound + outline + color)." This new epistemology of the nonobjective, which Kruchenykh only touched upon, is another core theme in the *Supremus* texts, especially those by Malevich and Roslavets.

In his intense and interesting article "On Nonobjective Art," Roslavets discussed the basis of the philosophy of nonobjective creation, in which he perceived a return from the individualistic philosophy of the particular to Platonic ideas of universals that exist independently of things.

Within a particular interpretation, the notion of the "nonobjective" can be reduced to a simple rejection of the dependency of the artist on the necessity to *represent* the object and on subordination to canons that require the artist to copy "nature," to render as accurate as possible a reproduction of visible nature and surrounding objects. If, however, in the interpretation of our term one goes back to a universal, the artist's striving toward "nonobjectiveness" in art can be raised to a profound basic principle of creativity.

Following Schopenhauer's conception, Roslavets singled out the notions of "will" and "intellect":

The power of the thing, of the object, is the power of the form, the idea; consequently, it is a state of the intellect enslaved by the will, and, as Schopenhauer correctly observes, only the intellect liberated from the will, the pure intellect, is capable of rising to the heights of the intuitive insight upon which creative genius exclusively depends. Our will is a symbol of the connection

between our spirit (pure intellect) and matter, the earth, our personal subjective interests. The will is therefore opposed to all activity of the intellect directed toward anything but its goals ... the purely practical ... relationship [to things and phenomena].

Only the artist, through contemplation and intuition, is capable of liberating himself from the will that binds all human acts and understanding the essence of pure creative will in its objective (ideas). The liberated artist replaces the "common sense" of naturalistic dogmatism with faith in the inexhaustible wealth of primary forms—ideas (in the Platonic sense) that are concealed in his soul, from which he draws upon at moments of creative inspiration to be intuitively embodied in his art. Intuition he understands to be the highest stage of cognition, when rationality must yield to "faith."

Roslavets perceived the origin of the principle of *nonobjectiveness* in art to lie in the rejection of positivist rationalism, of a utilitarian attitude toward art: "The contemporary artist has now matured to a consciousness of the necessity to *separate completely the will from the intellect* in the creative process."

In "The Mouth of the Earth and the Artist," Malevich discussed Suprematism as a new philosophy, whose goal was not to establish a new aesthetics or criterion of beauty (which Malevich, in his Suprematism, rejects), but to liberate consciousness: "The threads of the mind, the word and the sound, have stuck onto things, forming a whole spider's web in which consciousness has become entangled." Following Plato's dialectic, he described in his essay two opposing methodological principles. The essence of the first, which he considered a dead end, was to proceed downward from the most universal notions to the particular in an attempt "to find out the secret" through an object or thing contained within the boundaries of the material, "created" world: "through spirit,

they have tried to penetrate into the little cracks in the orifices of things ... through the word they have searched for themselves and for the mystery ... through color they have wanted to know the essence and the synthesis and the soul of things." The other path was toward synthesis, proceeding upward on the steps of generalized notions from the particular to the universal:

But those who have gone back out of things, out of the center of the earth, out of the marrow of its creative exertions—they have striven toward space. Those who have cracked the shell of the egg of creation of nature and emerged from it with no thought to the pieces of its scattered armor. Those who have come out of the color of things to color. Let us proceed out of the labyrinth of the earth into boundless space with numbers and color and let us husk the grain of consciousness.

The notion of intuition and inspiration in the metapoetics of *Supremus* can, I think, be interpreted as a principle synonymous with creation. Like Roslavets, Malevich gave priority to creative intuition over rational consciousness and what Matiushin called the "temptation of the personal." In "On the New and the Old in Music," Matiushin described this individualism as creeping "everywhere like mold," and continued, "our new body must be a powerful springboard at the moment of brilliant flight, not a heavy clay of all sorts of lascivious slush." Malevich, Matiushin, and Roslavets all used the same metaphor of earth to refer to the world of the purely material, the world revolving around all that is *human, too human*; only the absolute creative will is capable of bursting beyond the bounds of this world and approaching a knowledge of being. As Malevich wrote in "Cubism": "A great and mighty creative power has been shackled by the power of consciousness."

In this overcoming of human dimensions, in the rejection of the European concept of the "humanist" world that dates to the Renaissance, a world in which everything "human" is the center of the universe, Suprematism's poetics of dehumanization in some respects resembles the notion set forth by Heidegger in "Letter on Humanism." In the ontology of Suprematism, it is knowledge of the phenomenal world, the perception of being rather than of humanity, that is the task of art, and art is equated with philosophy in its aspiration to define the "creative will."

Throughout the *Supremus* articles, the idea of the "creative will" is contrasted with that of "art," which is repeatedly regarded as synonymous with "craft" or polished professional "mastery," implying a utilitarian nature. In "Futurism," Malevich wrote:

The unions and guilds of painters that have arisen in connection with the great Russian Revolution eloquently express artisan principles. This is the road of classifying people according to their guild. But there is something in art that is not amenable to any classification or guild. This something is present in the first steps of an idea, in the first discovered forms, and it ends where the recycling [of an idea or form] starts; [it] ceases its work and becomes a utilitarian product ... producing things for the use of the majority.

Creativity is regarded as a gift, whereas art is a trained ability, a skill. Suprematism is a revolution, a revolt against the "artisan guilds." Malevich contrasted his concept of creativity to the notion of "art as a means": "aesthetic, utilitarian, ideological (political, propagandistic) functions transform art into a means. Only nonobjective art, owing to its abstraction from the hurly-burly of the personal, family, and governmental life of protocols, is capable of rejecting these functions."⁴⁰ Analysis of these two

concepts—creativity and art—is complicated by the fact that the definitions provided are very vague and often contradictory, but in all interpretations art is always secondary to creativity; creativity can embrace art, but not vice versa. "Refined culture has burned up the reason[ing faculty] of art. . . . Socialism has illuminated to the world its freedom, and Art has fallen before the face of Creativity."⁴¹

Kliun began his essay "Nonobjective Art" with a general definition of art and a reference to "the confusion of two notions of art . . . representational art and the art of abstract form." He divided the entire history of art into two stages, with the first, the period of representational art, extending from "the first awakening of artistic consciousness in the savage up to and including" Cubism and Futurism. In the second, most recent phase, he wrote, "art has ceased to be a means and has become an end in itself." The "elements of reason, sense, feeling," he continued, "should not have any place in art; art has its own reason and sense."

This rejection of "reason" (or the "old reason") in favor of the creative principle is present also in Malevich's and Kruchenykh's rhetoric: "Thought and speech cannot keep up with the experience of inspiration," Kruchenykh wrote in "The Declaration of the Word as Such." The principles of dissonance, disharmony, "shifts" become the means by which the "old reason" and traditional aesthetic values are overcome—"through the storm, the crash, the break, the shine, the blows of the steps of the gigantic stride of running, smashing, and shifting," as Malevich described in "Greeting to the Suprematists." Here he introduced the dissonant poetic metaphor of the "angle," which symbolized the rejection of the aesthetic

criterion of beauty in nonobjective art: "By lowering the idea of Suprematism into shells of crudeness, we assure its viability. Our first step will be the beginning of this new road, of criss-crossing angles." Roslavets wrote in "On Nonobjective Art":

In liberating himself from the power of the representational, the artist liberates art from the last fetters that have thus far prevented it from manifesting its true essence. And with the liberation of art will come crashing down all the fortresses of scholastic dogmatism erected by the bustling labor of the so-called "science of beauty"—aesthetics—because it is the object from which all its tenets were derived and upon which it was built; not only did "things vanish like smoke" from the artist's field of vision, gone like smoke as well were the rotten foundations upon which they were based over entire centuries.

Instead of the "subjective" criterion of beauty, the Suprematists advanced the "objective" notion of the creative "law." Malevich wrote in "Cubism":

Beauty, taste, the ideal are terribly subjective. Everyone will agree that a square has four corners and that $2 \times 2 = 4$ There are laws and formulae about which we cannot say they are beautiful. Is $2 \times 2 = 4$ beautiful or ugly? The same obtains in the art of painting in particular, and in general there is a law in art that spares us this word.

This idea of the objective law is expressed in the formula (from "The Mouth of the Earth and the Artist"): "The artist must do not what he wants, but what must be done." Malevich's "must" presupposes a universal creative law based on the collective, on an overcoming of the ego, of the "earthly" self.

There is a deliberate tendency in the *Supremus* texts toward the extraindividual—a metamorphosis in avant-garde self-image from individual consciousness to

"collective creativity." The Suprematists set out to make the nonobjective not an individual reflection of the soul, but a universal idea presumably free from the individual psychology and emotions of the artist, the liberation of the spirit through creativity. Matiushin, in "On the New and the Old in Music," wrote:

The gifted and brilliant individuals of the past did not notice that seeping from everywhere into their originally pure creative flood were trickles of their little personal "I," which, as they merged, muddied and completely perverted their precious gift.

The strongest were obliged to savagely force their poor spiritual and corporeal nature in order to preserve the flame bearing them into the heavens free from the tasty burden of their little "I."

Udaltsova interpreted feeling and taste as the "whim of the artist," a negative manifestation of individuality. In "Thoughts on Art," she wrote: "The creation of epochs is [according to the law and therefore] greater than the creation of the individual soul." Matiushin proposed that the recipe for overcoming the "individual" in creation, specifically in the new music, lay in the "furious protest of real, healthy dissonance. . . . The only thing that can smooth out these beaten tracks and habitual inspired pits of weary [consonance] and joys of the personal 'I' is the powerful dissonance of the great intuition of the extra-personal set squarely before it."

In this self-contradictory perception of art as both a "created construction" subject not to "I want" but to "one must" in accordance with an objective law, and at the same time as an act of pure creative will and intuition rather than of intellect, in this rebellious pose of the anti-intelligent and antiintellectual, there is a paradoxical union of rationalism with mysticism and utopianism, an

approach Malevich himself aptly defined as the “intuitive reason” of Suprematism.

In its entire depth, Malevich’s notion of Suprematism represented a new epistemology of art, a spiritual quest, and not merely a new method in painting. He continued this quest beyond the boundaries of painting, in articles on poetry and music, in brochures, and even in letters, he agonizingly searched for a new critical language capable of expressing the weight of his ideas. Little remained in his writings of the romantic pathos of Futurist manifestos or the absurd paradoxes and irony of alogism. It is precisely Malevich’s literary style that is the key to understanding the essence of his theories. His Suprematist language is categorical and imperatively dogmatic. The ecstatic tone of his essays is reminiscent of a passionate, fanatical sermon. In this furious attitude toward art and the word there is something religious, or more exactly, heretical: his theories must above all be “believed in.” Similarly, the notion of the school or group in his interpretation far exceeded the boundaries of purely professional definitions or notions of the guild. As he understood it, the school was a “laboratory-house,” a political party, a religion:

Who will pass on the new book of new laws from our tablets? . . . The New Gospel in art. . . . Christ revealed heaven on earth, set an end to space, established two boundaries, two poles. . . . As for us, we will pass thousands of poles. . . . Space is larger than heaven, stronger, more powerful, and our new book teaches the space of the wilderness.⁴²

Notes

I would like to thank Geurt Imanse, Chief Curator for Research and Documentation, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, and the Foundation Cultural Center Khardzhiev-Chaga for their gracious help in obtaining unpublished materials from the Khardzhiev archive. I am indebted to Charles Rouble for his generous help with the translation of the original citations, and I am deeply grateful to John Malmstad, who took upon himself the labor of reading the manuscript and offered many valuable comments.

1. Kazimir Malevich, letter to Mikhail Matiushin, May 29, 1915, in “Malevich, K. Pisma k M. V. Matiushinu,” ed. E. F. Kovtun, in *Ezhgodnik rukopisnogo otdela Pushkinskogo Doma na 1974 god* (Leningrad: Rukopisnyi otdel Pushkinskogo Doma, 1976), p. 186.

2. Malevich, letter to Matiushin, May 27, 1915, in “Malevich, K. Pisma k M. V. Matiushinu,” pp. 185–86.

3. Malevich, letter to Matiushin, May 29, 1915, in “Malevich, K. Pisma k M. V. Matiushinu,” p. 186.

4. Malevich, letter to Matiushin, September 24, 1915, in “Malevich, K. Pisma k M. V. Matiushinu,” p. 187.

5. Olga Rozanova, letter to Aleksei Kruchenykh, December 1915, in *Experiment* 5 (1999), pp. 77–78.

6. Malevich, letter to Matiushin, September 25, 1915, in “Malevich, K. Pisma k M. V. Matiushinu,” pp. 180–81.

7. Malevich, letter to Matiushin, October 27, 1916, in “Malevich, K. Pisma k M. V. Matiushinu,” p. 186. This explains the 1916 dating of some of the extant *Supremus* manuscripts, particularly Matiushin’s, which was not sent until 1917 but was probably begun in 1916 and then laid aside.

8. The document is in the Khardzhiev archive, The Foundation Cultural Center Khardzhiev-Chaga, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam.

9. Rozanova, letter to Kruchenykh, 1916, in Nina Gurianova, *Exploring*

Color. Olga Rozanova and the Early Russian Avant-garde 1910–1918 (London: Gordon & Breach, 2000), p. 169.

10. Malevich, “Shto proiskhodilo v fevrale 1917 goda i v marte,” unpublished manuscript (1917), Khardzhiev archive, The Foundation Cultural Center Khardzhiev-Chaga, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam.

11. Malevich, untitled unpublished manuscript (“Chelovek est pechat . . .”) (1917), Khardzhiev archive, The Foundation Cultural Center Khardzhiev-Chaga, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam.

12. Rozanova, letter to Matiushin, May 1917, in Gurianova, *Exploring Color*, p. 168.

13. The document is in the Khardzhiev archive, The Foundation Cultural Center Khardzhiev-Chaga, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam.

14. See E. F. Kovtun’s commentaries in “Malevich, K. Pisma k M. V. Matiushinu,” p. 180.

15. Malevich, letter to Matiushin, 1917, in “Malevich, K. Pisma k M. V. Matiushinu,” p. 195.

16. M. M. Bakhtin, “Toward a Methodology for the Human Sciences,” in Bakhtin, *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, trans. Vern W. McGee (Austin: University of Texas, 1986), p. 166.

17. Yurkevich, untitled unpublished manuscript (1917), Khardzhiev archive, The Foundation Cultural Center Khardzhiev-Chaga, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam.

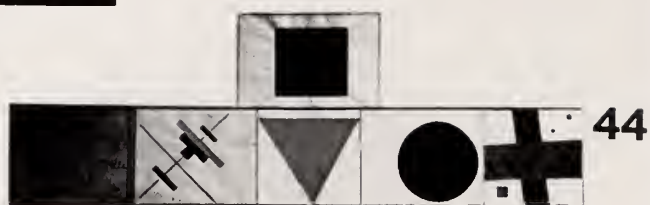
18. Rozanova, letter to Matiushin, May 1917, in Gurianova, *Exploring Color*, p. 168.

19. Rozanova, letter to Andrei Shemshurin, late May 1917, in Gurianova, *Exploring Color*, p. 171.

20. Rozanova, letter to Matiushin, June 18, 1917, Manuscript Division, Institute of Russian Literature (Pushkinskii Dom), f. 656.

- 21 Rozanova, letter to Andrei Shemshurin, in Gurianova, *Exploring Color*, p. 173
- 22 Nadezhda Udaltsova, "Dnevnik 1916–1918," in Udaltsova, *Zhizn russkoi kubistki Dnevnik, stati, vospominaniia* (Moscow: RA, 1994), p. 39
- 23 Ibid., p. 42
- 24 K. Malevich, "Privetstvie suprematizam" (1917); published in *Experiment* 5 (1999), pp. 77–78. All quotes from this text are from the original manuscript rather than from the published source, due to differences in the interpretation of Malevich's handwriting
- 25 Nikolai Roslavets, "O bespredmetnom iskusstve" (1917), unpublished manuscript, Khardzhiev archive, The Foundation Cultural Center Khardzhiev-Chaga, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam.
- 26 K. Malevich, "Kubizm" ("Cubism") (1917), published in *Experiment* 5 (1999), pp. 94–97. All quotes from this text are from the original manuscript rather than from the published source, due to differences in the interpretation of Malevich's handwriting
- 27 K. Malevich, "Usta zemli i khudozhnik" (1916–17), unpublished manuscript, Khardzhiev archive, The Foundation Cultural Center Khardzhiev-Chaga, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam.
- 28 Rozanova, "Kubizm, futurizm, suprematizm" ("Cubism, Futurism, Suprematism") (1917), manuscript, private collection, Moscow, published first in English, in *From Painting to Design. Russian Constructivist Art of the Twenties*, exh. cat., ed. and trans. John E. Bowlt (Cologne: Galerie Gmurzynska, 1981), pp. 100–13
- 29 Matiushin, "O Starom i Novom v muzyke" (March 20, 1916), authorized typewritten original, Manuscript Division, Mayakovskiy Museum, Moscow, inv. no. 11865.
- 30 Malevich, "Arkhitektura kak poshchechina zhelezo-betonu" (1917); published in the Moscow anarchist newspaper *Anarkhiia*, no. 37 (1918).
- 31 Malevich, "Futurizm" (1917), published in *Anarkhiia*, no. 57 (1918).
- 32 Ivan Kliun, *Moi put v iskusstve. Vospominaniia, stati, dnevniki* (Moscow: RA, 1999), pp. 250–54
- 33 Udaltsova, untitled unpublished manuscript (1917), Khardzhiev archive, The Foundation Cultural Center Khardzhiev-Chaga, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam.
- 34 Aleksei Kruchenykh, "Deklaratsiia slova kak takovogo" (1913–17), manuscript, Khardzhiev archive, The Foundation Cultural Center Khardzhiev-Chaga, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam. An identical copy of this text, from Matiushin's archive at the State Tretiakov Gallery, Moscow, is published in my *Iz literaturnogo nasledia Kruchenykh*, *Modern Russian Literature and Culture*, vol. 41 (Berkeley: Berkeley Slavic Specialties, 1999), pp. 203–05.
- 35 "The following is ready for publication," Rozanova wrote to Udaltsova in April 1917: "1) My article ['Cubism, Futurism, Suprematism'] 2) Kruchenykh's play 3) 'Declaration of the Word' 4) the poetry collection *Balos* and 5) *Blue Eggs*—of these two collections Kruchenykh suggested printing whatever we think possible. My two poems are here as well; tell Malevich that I don't object to including them." (Gurianova, *Exploring Color*, p. 169.) The original manuscripts of Rozanova's article "Cubism, Futurism, Suprematism" and her and Kruchenykh's poetry are in a private collection in Moscow.
- 36 All of these unpublished manuscripts are in the Khardzhiev archive, Amsterdam. In a note to Malevich in the same archive, Udaltsova mentioned another article for *Supremus*, "Otnoshenie publiki i kritiki k sovremennomu iskusstvu," and suggested the following order for printing her materials: "1) first this essay [No. 8], 2) then 'The Public and the Critic's Attitude' [3] letters, 4) 'Thoughts on Art' . . . My letter to you is better not to publish, perhaps."
- 37 Malevich, "Nashe soznanie (1917); published (with the title "Supremus") in *Experiment* 5 (1999), pp. 90–92. All quotes from this text are from the original manuscript rather than from the published source, due to differences in the interpretation of Malevich's handwriting
- 38 For a detailed discussion of Rozanova's contribution to the theory of color in Suprematism and color-painting, see my *Exploring Color*
- 39 Rozanova, letter to Kruchenykh, summer 1915, in Gurianova, *Exploring Color*, p. 156.
- 40 Quoted from the original manuscript in the Khardzhiev archive, The Foundation Cultural Center Khardzhiev-Chaga, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam
- 41 Ibid.
- 42 Malevich, letter to Matiushin, 1917, in "Malevich, K. Pisma k M. V. Matiushinu," p. 195.

SUPREMATISMUS



MALEWITSCH
1913-20



UNOWISS
1921

PAGE FROM EL LISSITZKY AND HANS ARP, *DIE KUNSTISMEN*
LES ISMES DE L'ART THE ISMS OF ART (ERLENBACH-
ZURICH EUGEN RENTSCH, 1925)

THE OPTIMISM OF A NONOBJECTIVIST

“The optimism of a nonobjectivist”: This is how Kazimir Malevich defined his position in the philosophical polemical tract *Bog ne skinut: Iskusstvo, Tserkov, Fabrika* (*God Is Not Cast Down: Art, Church, Factory*, 1922). El Lissitzky did not understand this position at all.¹

The relationship between these two major figures of twentieth-century art has always attracted attention. Was Lissitzky, the enthusiast of a renewal of Jewish art, Malevich’s student in the usual sense of the word? Did Lissitzky betray Marc Chagall for Malevich? Did Lissitzky betray Malevich for European Constructivism? Did Lissitzky betray European Constructivism for Stalinist realism? Lissitzky’s art was a busy crossroads. Here the history of Suprematism and Unovism met the history of the Jewish avant-garde, Moscow Constructivism, the European International Style of the 1920s, Dutch De Stijl, the Bauhaus, and the Eastern European avant-garde. These myriad connections help us understand more fully the development and uniqueness of the ideas of Malevich and Unovis.

Lissitzky never forgot the role played in his life by his encounter with Suprematism. Even in the years of his conscious amnesia about everything avant-garde, he calmly and unhesitatingly said,

"A special influence on me was my friendship with the late Malevich."² In recent years, many new facts have come to light that allow us confidently to replace the word "friendship" with the word "rivalry." Creative rivalry in and of itself does not preclude friendship, at least to a point, but a break is inevitable.

Do you remember 1919, when we were planning to work on Suprematism and wanted to write a book?

—Malevich to Lissitzky, 1924³

Where did they make these plans—in Vitebsk or in Moscow? In 1919, Lissitzky came to Moscow with his apprentices to buy materials for his workshop and invited Malevich to teach with him in Vitebsk. The invitation was signed by Vera Ermolaeva, rector of the Vitebsk Popular Art School, who knew Malevich from Petrograd. Lissitzky had probably checked it all with the director, Chagall, who did not know Malevich. Chagall felt no threat in the Suprematist's arrival in "my Vitebsk." After all, the Futurist Ivan Puni (Jean Pougny) had worked at the school for several months and there had been no conflicts between him and Chagall. Or perhaps there simply had not been enough time for them to arise.

Malevich was amazed: "I didn't leave, something took me away. . . . I was taken away to Vitebsk."⁴ It happened swiftly. He had just enough time to do the paperwork necessary for a business trip to Vitebsk. It took Malevich and Lissitzky three days to get to Smolensk, where they spent the night before continuing on their journey. When they arrived in Vitebsk, Malevich immediately telegraphed Moscow, asking that his studio at the Second State Free Art Workshops be kept. How would things work out in the new place? He still hoped that a solo exhibition he was

planning in Moscow would open in mid-November. (It did open, but not until March 25, 1920.)

As of November 1, 1919, Malevich was registered as a professor in Vitebsk. It looked as if he would avoid the cold and impoverished winter in Moscow, where people were stealing fences for fuel. He would get a rest from the constant conflicts with Izo Narkompros (the Department of Fine Arts of the People's Commissariat of Education). Malevich's usual opponent within the avant-garde was Vladimir Tatlin, but he also argued with Vasily Kandinsky, who had a lot to say about which paintings would be bought for museums and to which museums they would go,⁵ and Osip Brik, who had been put in charge of reforming the Second State Free Art Workshops in May 1919, was wary of him. However, Malevich's main "enemy" was David Shterenberg, head of Izo Narkompros, who had his own, Parisian, point of view (just as Kandinsky had a prewar Munich point of view), which differed greatly from the radical outlook of the Moscow innovators.⁶

In Vitebsk, there were plans to publish Malevich's theoretical text *O novykh sistemakh v iskusstve* (*On New Systems in Art*), to which Malevich added "Ustanovlenie A" ("Statute A"). Three paintings by Malevich, *Portrait of the Artist Kliun* (1913), *Cow on Violin* (1913), and *Suprematism* (n.d.), were hung at the *Pervaia gosudarstvennaia vystavka kartin mestnykh i moskovskikh khudozhnikov* (*First State Exhibition of Paintings by Local and Moscow Artists*), which opened in Vitebsk a week after Malevich's arrival there. Lissitzky showed works on Jewish themes. Chagall worried about nothing. On November 17, Malevich gave a lecture at the exhibition, titled "Latest Trends in Art (Impressionism, Cubism, and Futurism)." This was a familiar topic for him, but for the

audience, which included intellectuals from Petrograd, it was strange, new information, and the lecture was received with interest. Two rallies followed. At one, on December 9, Lissitzky spoke out in defense of pure art: "A bird sings freely and an artist must work just as freely."⁷

Lissitzky's students became Malevich's followers. His personality had an overwhelming effect on the students, as it had once had on Lissitzky. They perceived him not only as a professor who could teach them to work professionally, European-style, to earn a living from their art, but as a guide to the unknown system of views called Suprematism, the discoverer of which was before them. Of course, Malevich, like others, played at revolutionary talk, but he also called passionately on the students to be alive in art and told them that modernity represented purity of the individual.

Malevich, a born prophet and leader, found himself in a favorable atmosphere. A group of young people (some as young as fourteen) had formed around him in just a few weeks. He was supported, on the faculty, by Ermolaeva and Nina Kogan. At Lissitzky's request, he edited *On New Systems in Art*. He was sure that the thin book, which would be published "by primitive methods,"⁸ would become not only "the trace of my path but the start of our collective movement."⁹

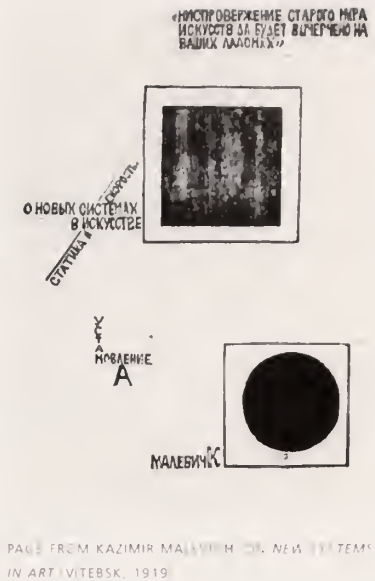
The first project of the "collective movement" led by Malevich and Lissitzky was decorations for the two-year-anniversary convocation of the Vitebsk Committee to Combat Unemployment. The group painted 1,500 square meters of canvas, three buildings, and the stage of the city theater, where the committee's main meeting was to be held. A sketch for the curtain,¹⁰ perhaps Lissitzky and Malevich's only joint decorative project, was, if not the first,

then one of the first for Lissitzky in the Suprematist style and opened the path to his Prouns.

The group of young artists around Malevich began to feel theirs was a special creative movement not bound by the framework of the Vitebsk school.

How were they to define themselves? As young Cubists? But after the Cubists had come the Futurists and the Suprematists. As young followers of the new art? But why only followers? Finally they came up with a word: Unovis. Affirmers of the New Art. Unity. Their motto could have been *pro unovis* (for the common cause). Unovis tried to establish its leadership among the city's art circles. It wanted to replace the cultural structures of the local authorities with the Council for the Affirmation of New Forms in Art, with Malevich, Lissitzky, Ermolaeva, and Kogan on the board. They forgot Chagall, even though he was considered director of the school until the end of June 1920. Ivan Gavris, a member of the first Unovis Creative Committee, related eight years later that "propaganda came from all sides. It reached the point at which Marc Chagall, under pressure from the extreme left, could not establish the ideology of his individual-innovator movement. His audience had been propagandized away."¹¹

That Unovis worked is due in great part to Lissitzky and Ermolaeva, but Malevich's ideas and his very image had a decisive impact on Unovis and the fate of Suprematism in the 1920s.¹² Malevich proposed a new artistic ideology,



10 ● 17 МАЛЫЙ ЗАЛЪ МОСКОВСКОЙ КОНСЕРВАТОРИИ

ВЪ СУББОТУ, 25-ГО ФЕВРАЛЯ, въ 8 час. вечера,

ПУБЛИЧНО-НАУЧНО-ПОПУЛЯРНАЯ ЛЕКЦИЯ
ПРОТЕТЬ

К. МАЛЕВИЧЪ

В.А. ЗИМАНЪ
„ОБРУЧЕННЫЕ КОЛЬЦОМЪ ГОРИЗОНТА И НОВЫЯ ИДЕИ
ВЪ ИСКУССТВЕ: КУБИЗМЪ, ФУТУРИЗМЪ, СУПРЕМАТИЗМЪ“.

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| 1) Новый шагъ въ искусствѣ и отношеніе къ нему
искусствовѣдъ. | 2) Вліяніе Фурьерова ученія на искусство
искусства в началѣ века. | 3) Вліяніе Фурьерова ученія на искусство
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26% искусство съ чужимъ гребнемъ въ голову. Не-е! въ искусство только дѣлать заносимыя, провозвѣщать въ міру
идею. Мы, не-искусство, Марксизмъ!

POSTER FOR MALEVICH'S LECTURE "BETROTHED BY THE RING
OF THE HORIZON AND NEW IDEAS IN ART," THE MOSCOW
CONSERVATORY, FEBRUARY 25, 1917

with which he hoped not only to change the world—who didn't grandly proclaim that in the 1920s?—but a new attitude toward art, as a philosophy and a way of life. In doing so, he countered not only earlier and contemporary ideologies of art, but also the new structures that post-October Revolution Russia was offering the world. Unlike Malevich, Lissitzky did not have a globalizing idea. Devoted to the idea of new art as a whole and sensitive to the possibilities and nuances of the new, he perceived them personally, as his own.

Malevich imagined his idea of a universal art being realized and developed over a long period of time, as a synthetic system similar to that of the Antique or the Gothic. His idea awaited those who would realize it, refining, polishing, and elaborating on it. Teaching, for him, was a way of finding and creating the people who would do this. An organic irrationalist, he built teaching, with enviable rationality, as a path for seeking new perspectives in art.

Early on, he had begun thinking about how to make the experience of new art the basis of training and educating a new artistic personality. One of the first confirmations

of his intention to move from polemicizing with everyone and everything to constructive work had been his public popular-scholarly lecture "Obruchennye koltsom gorizonta i noviya idei v iskusstv: kubizm, futurizm, suprematizm" ("Betrothed by the Ring of the Horizon and the New Ideas in Art: Cubism, Futurism, Suprematism"), presented on the eve of the revolutionary events of February 1917 in the Small Hall of the Moscow Conservatory. The artist began, as usual, with a sarcastic reply to the foes of avant-garde art, the idols of the intelligentsia: Dmitri Merezhkovsky, an ideologue of Symbolism and the new religious consciousness; Alexandre Benois, an artist and critic and leader of the artistic association World of Art; Nikolai Berdyaev, a leading figure of the religio-philosophical renaissance of the Silver Age and one of the precursors of existentialism; and Petr Kogan, a Marxist and a sociologist, one of the active foes of new art in the 1920s. But the concluding part of the lecture bore a calm, positive character. Without any attempt to shock, Malevich demonstrated and explained Cubist, Futurist, and Suprematist drawings and paintings, trying to persuade the audience and to explain his principles. As a visual aid, he drew Cubist pictures. (Masterly drawing as a method of explaining the laws of modern composition would subsequently be used by Malevich's students in Vitebsk.)

In 1918–19, Malevich's still rather abstract concepts of art teaching took on concrete shape and clarity. He taught simultaneously at the First State Free Art Workshops (where his assistant was Nadezhda Udaltsova) and the Second State Free Art Workshops (where his assistant was Antoine Pevsner). The teaching experience at the latter school, where Malevich had a profound impact on Gustav Klutis, Ivan Kudriashev, and Sergei Senkin, was particularly

valuable. It was also here that Iosif Meerzon and Tevel Shapiro (later Tatlin's assistants in the construction of the model of the Monument to the Third Communist International [1919]) and Georgi Krutikov (who would stun Moscow's architectural circles in the late 1920s with his project for a flying city) got their start.

In the program for his studio at the Second State Free Art Workshops, presented to the Soviet of Masters and dated September 15, 1919, Malevich clearly outlined his teaching process. Within this program are several passages that relate particularly to his future teaching in Vitebsk (indeed, a comparison of this program with the programs from Vitebsk shows a conscious borrowing):

Group 1. Abstraction of things, knowledge of painting and sculptural volumes, planes, lines, and curves. Preparatory course for Cubism.

These precepts became the foundation for assignments in the preparatory workshop taught by Nina Kogan in Vitebsk. In her article "On the Schedule of the Unified Program of Unovis," published in *Unovis: Handbill of the Vitebsk Creative Committee* (no. 1, November 20, 1920), she cites, as the guide for action, a fragment of a letter from Malevich to Kudriashev (who at the time was organizing art workshops in Orenburg):

Every thing is composed or made up of lines, curves, volumes, and planes, which basically come from the movement of the point. But the main idea is that each of these primary elements ... is turned into a body, that is, an organism. [F]rom what has become clear about how things and all that is visible in nature are formed, and of what they primarily consist, came the new method of teaching.

Malevich's Second State Free Art Workshops program continues:

Group 2. Cubism. . . . Cubism and nature, statics and movement. . . . The symmetry in painting of color elements, mass of form and construction. Sculpture. Constructing forms by the system of Cubism.

Group 3. Futurism. . . . Futurism and nature, city and country, elements of city and country as things influencing the course of construction of a dynamic moment.

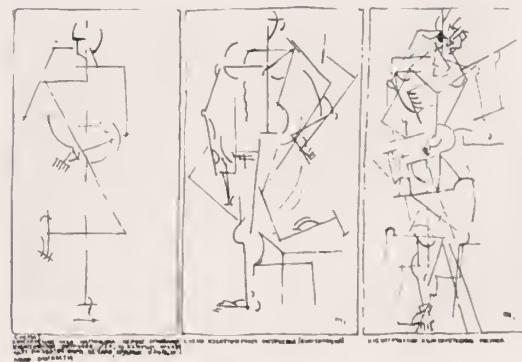
Group 4. Suprematism. . . . Constructing forms by the system of Suprematism.¹³

In light of this, Malevich's idea of organizing a Russia-wide Unovis group based on his teaching program does not seem unrealistic: the general, most fundamental principles had already been laid out.

I am running the entire school, learning from myself.

—Malevich to Mikhail Gershenzon, 1920¹⁴

The Suprematism that Malevich brought to Vitebsk had a great advantage over other systems of art. Extolling the "primacy of color," it operated in the pure language of geometry. It did not matter that its philosophical basis was not very understandable. Its language was like the language of icons, in that icon painting is taught and the



PAGE FROM KAFIM R. MALEVICH THE NEW TECHNIQUE OF ART
[ME 1 VITEBSK 1919]



MALEVICH'S COVER FOR NIKOLAI PUNIN, *FIRST CYCLE OF LECTURES* (PETROGRAD: SEVENTEENTH STATE PRINTING HOUSE, 1920)

understanding of its spirituality comes later; the Suprematist composition, once it had achieved the status of a sign, would also acquire meaning.

The Vitebsk programs were based on the "law of geometric economy."¹⁵ Economy concentrates the power of form. Geometry could have become the subject of a new philosophy, but the experience of

Suprematism in 1916–17 showed that it could exist in another state by becoming more "practical": "Machine, house, person, table—they are all painting's volume systems, intended for specific goals." Therefore, a "new style of Suprematist decoration" was possible.¹⁶

Unovis began with Suprematism as a style for decorating a city through the means of geometry. What was the connection between this decorative Suprematism and Suprematism as an artistic system as a whole? Decorative Suprematism wanted to learn about its roots. Students approached analytical lessons in the studio more consciously. Their work in the city sharpened their interest in architecture. The curriculum was perceived as a sum of knowledge and techniques in Modern art, but most of all as a program for developing creativity. Here we see a relationship with the early Vkhutemas (Higher Artistic-Technical Workshops) in Moscow and with the Bauhaus, although the Vitebsk programs were probably less formal. Their emphasis was on the belief that the "system in art

is the sum of systems of interrelationships, actions that form . . . man's world view as a whole."¹⁷

Malevich was in no hurry. He waited for the students to reach an understanding of the system on their own. Lissitzky was more impatient. Just like the students and the other teachers, he had to grasp his own attitude toward the foundations of Suprematism. A paradoxical situation arose: having produced a series of effective decorative projects and having turned into something of a Suprematist, Lissitzky worked with incredible energy and passion on his own system, which he would later call "Prounism" (deriving the term "Proun" from *proekt Unovisa* [project of Unovis] or *proekt utverzhdeniia novogo* [project of the affirmation of the new]). For the artists in his workshop, being next to the Prouns was interesting, but, judging by their work, it did not keep them from taking their own paths toward Suprematism. "Prounism" remained only the personal invention of Lissitzky; it did not become a new school, even though the effect of Lissitzky's teaching on his students' imaginations is evident in such projects as Ilia Chashnik's design for a tribune for Red Square in Smolensk, published in *Unovis: Handbill of the Vitebsk Creative Committee* (no. 1).

The connection between Prouns and Malevich's Suprematism and Klutskis's *Dynamic City* (1919) lies in the cosmos: Suprematist space replaced earthly reality, and the Prouns were a kind of cosmic experiment (rather than a way station on the path to architecture). If Prouns did move into architecture itself, it was for exhibitions, where they brilliantly employed a clash of perspectives and visual effects. Malevich later noted calmly, "Even though Prouns are close to Suprematism, still their dynamic relations are not the same as in Suprematism. The moves are different

and even the figures in the chess game are different, even though the game is chess."¹⁸

Lissitzky later claimed that after his departure from Vitebsk, his studio, under Malevich's influence, had lost interest in architecture, but this was not true. Architecture remained a central focus in the Vitebsk studios, as a new art. Lissitzky's former studio, which the students proclaimed to be the architectural-technical department, continued to function as an experimental workshop, even though it had no real leader. Malevich continued to give it his special attention, but the tone was set there by Nikolai Suetin, Chashnik, Ivan Chervinko, and Lazar Khidekel. Malevich and his closest students in Vitebsk had already come to see the law that at Ginkhuk (State Institute of Artistic Culture) in Leningrad would be called the "law of complementary elements": "Every thing consists of contrasting combinations of various forms."¹⁹ The course stressed dynamics, which led to "further creative development in the field of volumetric material Suprematism, which led to actual construction. Thus . . . ends the following of the system of development of creativity, and it continues as discoveries in the field of as yet undiscovered systems."²⁰ Suprematism remained the path into the unknown, the new. "In it arises the idea of a new organism, construction, in which science, technology, architecture, and painting arts must form their unity."²¹

In one of his passionate Vitebsk declarations, "Become Builders" ("Stante stroiteliami"), Lissitzky called upon his students and all young artists with a conviction worthy of Malevich: "You will build a new sign for a new world—its secret will be guessed by those who will follow us. And then you will stop being professionals and become universal. The rectangle of a painting's canvas will be too

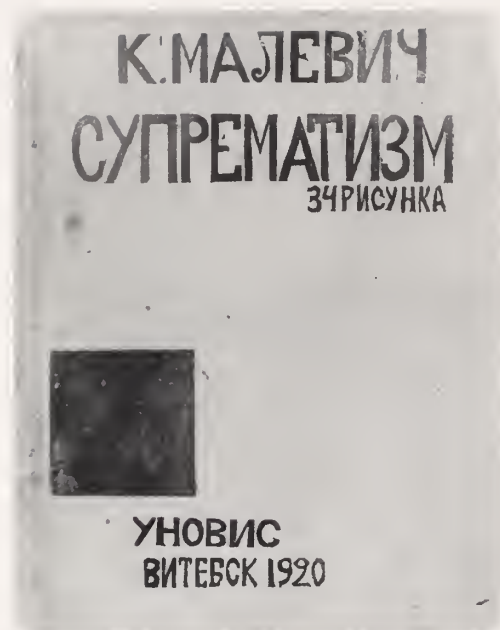
cramped for you, and you will enter into the square of life."²² The young Vitebsk students came out into the square of life early, but the rectangle of the painting's canvas called to them. This is where it had all begun, and this is where they returned with what they had found outside painting. "Malevich painted a black square. The artist dared to risk destruction," proclaimed Lissitzky.²³ Malevich's sacrifice was a salvation. Puni said of *Black Square* (1915), "the artistic qualities of such a work are clearly not great."²⁴ Probably there are many who think so today.

Art has once again met the figurative world of motors and machines, the world of technology, which it must destroy as it did the figurative world of academic arts, and only then will come the true form of the new world.

—Malevich, draft of a letter to Dutch artists, 1921²⁵

In October 1920, Unovis held a conference in Smolensk, where Vladislav Strzheminsky was in charge of fine arts. Malevich, Chashnik, Khidekel, and Lissitzky attended the conference. From Smolensk, Lissitzky headed to Moscow, not knowing whether he would ever return to Vitebsk. An official pass, a document characteristic of the passing era of military Communism, was required for the trip—the civil war had not ended, even though peace had been made with Poland. "The holder depicted in the photograph, Lazar Markovich Lissitzky, is a professor at the Vitebsk State Free Art Workshops, which is attested by the signatures and attached seal."²⁶

In Vitebsk, life went on. There were exhibitions and discussions of the most varied problems in art. Outside the studios, however, there was conflict after conflict. Inspired by the example of the Moscow authorities, those in



COVER FOR KAZIMIR MALEVICH, *SUPREMATISM*
34 DRAWINGS (VITEBSK UNOVIS, 1920)

Vitebsk began a planned attack on Unovis. By order of the Vitebsk Provincial Committee of Labor, the artists of Unovis, including Malevich, were required to take part in the design and decoration of the city for the third anniversary of the October Revolution. The designs they proposed were rejected. Unovis's foes tried to "straighten out" its pedagogical work. Malevich boldly defended his child, but his physical and psychological overextension was evident. Later, he would believe that he "lost a lot [of time] in Vitebsk."²⁷ At a difficult moment, he even appealed as an artist of the new art to his eternal opponent, Shterenberg, "I've been in exile long enough; it is time for me to work in the center, if you have not changed your mind about appointing me head of the International Bureau [of Izo Narkompros] and offering me a studio."²⁸

Despite this, serious work continued in Vitebsk. In December 1920, the Unovis studios published Malevich's album *Suprematism: 34 risunka* (*Suprematism: 34 Drawings*), a unique graphic work and methodological manual, a collection of basic Suprematist compositions. It had been assumed that the preface would be written by Lissitzky. At that time, a plan was also in place to publish a collection of Malevich's texts in German; the texts had been given to Lissitzky so that he could familiarize himself with them and eventually translate them, but a brief conflict arose when it was thought that Lissitzky had lost Malevich's materials. Lissitzky's text for the Malevich album was awaited patiently. The end result is known, however: the teacher wrote the preface himself.

There are various possible answers to the question of why Lissitzky did not write the text. A short-lived sulk or his incredible busyness in Moscow are among the least likely. It is more probable that he was just too involved in preparing

an album of his Prouns, writing the text for it. (The album came out in January 1921.) Lissitzky sensed his connection to Malevich and wanted his presence and support in Moscow. "You're not meant to stay in Vitebsk," he wrote.²⁹ Malevich came to Moscow at every opportunity, but his hopes of getting his own studio at Vkhutemas were illusory. So were his hopes of creating a Russia-wide Unovis collective from the Vitebsk group and former students from the Second State Free Art Workshops, who he hoped would become instructors of the new art throughout the country. Malevich clearly underestimated the seriousness and significance of the events that occurred after his departure to the provinces from Moscow.

Malevich's former students Klutskis and Senkin, both of whom were extremely active and influential among Moscow's young artists, had told Malevich that they would head Unovis's Creative Committee in that city. But Malevich was displeased by their ineffectiveness in asserting the ideas of Unovis: "The Moscow Creative Committee is lagging behind; it's still a baby chick."³⁰ The Muscovites were perhaps chilled by the ban by Izo Narkompros on the magazine *Vestnik ispolkoma Moskovskikh Vysshikh Gosudartsvennykh Masterskikh* (*Bulletin of the Executive Committee of the Moscow Higher State Studios*), prepared in the fall of 1920 on the initiative of Senkin, a former secretary of the All-Russian Central Committee of Students at Izo Narkompros. The magazine had offered its pages to the artists group of Obmokhu and, naturally, to Unovis. Malevich harshly criticized what he believed were the compromising positions of the department, which attacked Tatlin almost ritually.³¹ Senkin pushed for the idea of forming a new "party in art," forgetting that he and Klutskis had already become members of the Bolshevik Party. A party,

even in art, seemed like a daring and absurd challenge, for the country was already becoming one with a single party and a single ideology.

This is only the superficial picture, however. Senkin was at a crossroads. He liked what both Lissitzky and Aleksandr Rodchenko were doing, but he was oriented primarily toward Klutskis's work. Klutskis, who, along with Naum Gabo and Pevsner, had taken part in *Vystavka posvyashchenniya III Kongressu Komintern* (*Exhibition Dedicated to the Third Congress of the Comintern*), the legendary exhibition held on Tverskoi Boulevard in 1921, was following a path that touched only slightly upon Suprematism. "I am building a new reality that never existed before," he wrote in January 1921.³² Klutskis was looking forward to a Unovis exhibition in Moscow, but he was also waiting for an Inkhuk (Institute of Artistic Culture) exhibition planned for spring 1922 (which never took place). His work was appreciated equally by the Vitebsk artists and by artists who declared themselves to be Constructivists. The "inertia" of Unovis's Moscow Creative Committee, then, was rather a question of creative differences. Klutskis could not understand the philosophical ambitions of Suprematism, the ever-increasing interest in artistic ideology in Vitebsk.

Lissitzky appreciated Klutskis right away. He understood his desire to bring things to technological perfection, to make a kind of artistic design ready, in theory, for technical realization. This was not a utopian aspiration but invention, arising at the intersection of artistic and technical imagination. Lissitzky, who had the amazing ability to incorporate the most varied things into his work without eclecticism, was broader and deeper, however. The architect in him was always correcting the enthusiasms of the artist. He

was very attentive to how the new architects understood form, or rather, wanted to understand it. It was at this time that Lissitzky first came into contact with Nikolai Ladovsky, the future leader and theoretician of Asnova (Association of New Architects), with which Lissitzky would work in the second half of the 1920s. Asnova tied the understanding of formalism in architecture to artistic rationalism. There was some interest in bringing Lissitzky to the department of architecture at Vkhutemas, not as a practicing architect, but as a person from the realm of art. There was talk about a course on monumental painting and architecture. Lissitzky was planning to give a lecture on that topic at Inkhuk. For the time being, however, he taught drafting to electrical-engineering students there. Lissitzky watched closely the work of the Constructivists—two groups who were very different in their goals, Obmokhu and the artists who raised the banner of Industrial Constructivism.

A still hidden but real divide was forming between Lissitzky and Malevich and Unovis. Malevich spoke out harshly against both groups who called themselves Constructivists. Among the Industrial Constructivists were artists who had recently appeared in exhibitions with paintings under the sign of Suprematism—Liubov Popova, Aleksandr Vesnin, and Rodchenko (who had responded to white Suprematism with *Black on Black* [1919]). Polemic breeds persistent stereotypes, and anyone who had studied with Malevich knew that Rodchenko exemplified the incorrect, superficial understanding of nonfigurative art.

Some time later, Lissitzky would recall the Vitebsk days and realize how much had been done during that time, and how many future developments had been foretold there. He began to feel that Constructivism had appeared in parallel in Vitebsk and Moscow, before Tatlin's tower and

Constructivist theater design had emerged. But he would not have been understood either in Moscow or in Vitebsk. Of course, Unovis had Chashnik's design for the Smolensk tribune, but on the whole the path of its work was different from that taken in Moscow. What kind of Constructivism were the Muscovites talking about? Lissitzky would work in the West for some time before being able to answer that question.

Lissitzky wanted to be in the West in order to open its eyes to the new Russian art, which in Germany was perceived through the prism of Kandinsky and Chagall. The arrival in Berlin of Puni and Aleksandr Arkhipenko had not cardinaly changed the perception. Malevich supported Lissitzky in his desire to go away for two years. At least Unovis would have a reliable emissary and propagandizer. This was particularly necessary given that the group was negotiating the first big exhibition of Russian Modern art abroad. Lissitzky worked in the Comintern publishing house, had many friends in Communist cultural circles, and had even studied in Germany. A better ambassador for Unovis could not have been imagined.

We know that Klutskis traveled on Comintern business to Denmark in 1921, but we do not know what kind of "revolution" he was planning to organize in the peaceful homeland of Hans Christian Andersen. We can only surmise. There were also the wishes and instructions from Unovis: to defend the group's interests in the West, in particular at the first exhibition of Russian art in Germany, *Erste russische Kunstausstellung (First Russian Art Exhibition)*, to be held at the Galerie van Diemen, Berlin, in 1922.

Plans for the exhibition had been discussed as early as

spring 1921, but preparation was slow and Malevich and many of his students had already left Vitebsk for Petrograd by the time it opened in late fall of the following year. All sides had their own interests: The gallery, naturally, had commercial interests to consider. It was taking a certain risk, for its business until that time had been in classical art. The German authorities were counting on the diplomatic effect of the exhibition; postwar Germany could not afford to overlook even revolutionary Russia. The Soviet authorities, of course, would have preferred to earn money on the sale of works from the show, but the propaganda effect was too important. Far from all Bolsheviks still believed in the final victory of their revolution. If the victory of world revolution were to take place, however, it would come through revolution in Germany.

The People's Commissar of Education, Anatoly Lunacharsky, was, in the end, pleased by the exhibition's political success, but he noted the displeasure of many artists, especially the ones from Petrograd.³³ Shterenberg had been placed in charge of the exhibition overall, but the works from Petrograd had been curated by Natan Altman. Shterenberg's assistant in clerical matters had been a young artist from Obmokhu, Nikolai Denisovsky, a student of Georgi Yakolov. From time to time, Gabo and Lissitzky dropped in at the gallery while the show was being set up. Malevich was kept abreast of all developments by Lissitzky. He had made an ideological decision to show four works from his 1920 solo exhibition: *Black Square* (1915; page 118), *Black Circle* (1915), *Black Cruciform Planes* (1915), and *White Square* (1918). Interestingly, he did not include *Red Square* (1915; page 126), which at the time was hanging at Mikhail Matiushin's house in Petrograd.³⁴ There would have been no problem getting it for the show, but

Red Square was not important to universal Unovis. The black cross was titled *Black Cruciform Planes* and nothing else—no mysticism. What should this group of works be called, if the catalogue would not have any essays or manifestos? "Suprematism 1913 Russia." Was this quasi-nationalist? That was dubious; the Suprematists were dealing only with art. "Being idealistic in art, I ask you to be idealistic toward me, too."³⁵

The works of Malevich and Unovis looked good, formally. There were methodological drawings on Cubism made in the Vitebsk studios. Malevich's works were presented in the catalogue. They were more than noticed, they intrigued people; their influence (just as that of the Prouns) was indubitable. But what was Unovis? That was not made clear. Malevich's main request—that Suprematism and Unovis appear clearly as a special movement—was not met.

But it was just an exhibition and there would be others. There were still plans for an international art magazine, born in the bowels of the International Bureau of Izo Narkompros and supported as a propaganda tool by influential Party-Comintern bosses.³⁶ Lissitzky began publishing the magazine *Veshch/Gegenstand/Objet (Object)* together with the writer Ilia Ehrenburg. "We have at last realized here the idea that was born long ago in Russia—the publication of an international journal of modern art."³⁷

Veshch was not merely another magazine of Modern art, but the megaphone through which a new attitude toward art could be expressed. Its reader and follower was the European intellectual who believed in new art and the humanistic transformation of the world. *Veshch* was to be a discussion club, where answers to those overly general questions could be found. Many people in Moscow and



COVER FOR VESHCH/GEGENSTAND/OBJET NO. 3 (MAY 1922)

Petrograd could not understand this approach. Lissitzky felt a certain embarrassment regarding his Vitebsk colleagues and Malevich: *Veshch* was immediately regarded as an international review and not as a conduit for Suprematist propaganda. Suprematism had a visible place in the journal, but it was presented not as a springboard to the future, but simply as one of the components of the new.

Lissitzky was living in a new artistic climate. Common terms had a different meaning for him than for his colleagues in Moscow and Petrograd. He could recommend, perhaps unsurprisingly, the De Stijl rationalist Theo van Doesburg as a Suprematist, but more unexpected was his revision of the concept of Constructivism. It was probably Lissitzky who was the first to suggest uniting the different examples of the new style that had emerged in various countries under that term. In Germany, many understood almost instantly that Constructivism had come from mysterious revolutionary Russia. The idea of a Constructivist International arose (substituted, by Lissitzky, for Malevich's idea of a universal Unovis). The idea was short-lived, however. Yesterday's Dadaists—now respectable Bauhaus professors, De Stijl masters—rejected Expressionism, the new objectivity, and Art Deco, but they all had their own point of view regarding what art should be.

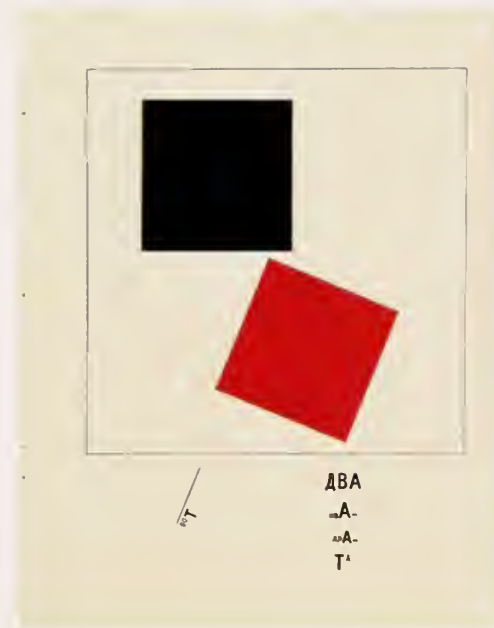
Malevich was known in innovative circles (Kurt Schwitters, for example, devoted one of the grottoes in his multiobject *Merzbau* to him). He was becoming, in great part due to Lissitzky, one of the myths of the new art— attractive, frightening, and mysterious, mystic and revolutionary. Mystic? He was simply a master who revealed geometry as the language of Modern art: "We want every form, volume, and plane to be geometric in its economic

necessity," the program for the Vitebsk studios had proclaimed.³⁸

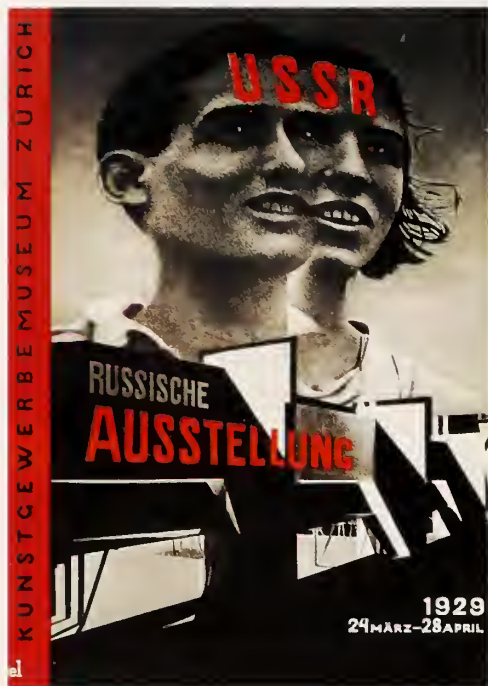
Adolph Benet, one of the organizers of the *First Universal German Art Exhibition*, shown in Moscow, Leningrad, and Saratov in 1924–25, and a good friend of Lissitzky and Sophie Küppers, noted "the striking influence . . . of the Russian Constructivists" and that "Lissitzky, a Russian Constructivist artist working in Germany, has done much to familiarize Germans with the achievements of the new Russian art."³⁹

International congresses of artists in Weimar and Düsseldorf in 1922 showed the illusoriness of trying to create a Constructivist International. The schism was based not only on artistic issues, but on sociopolitical positions as well. László Moholy-Nagy, accustomed to being on the cutting edge of art fashion, did not know what he would be in the coming season—Suprematist, Constructivist, or something else. Hungarian artists and theoreticians were the most receptive to the ideas coming out of Russia. But leftists of all stripes, from the fanatic Hungarian Communist Bella Witz to Walter Gropius, had to wonder whether the art called Constructivist was the art of universal socialism, as Boris Arvatov and Brik, the theoreticians of Moscow's Industrial Constructivism, maintained, or whether it was simply an object of aesthetics from the era of the unfolding industrial-scientific revolution? Vladimir Mayakovsky, agitating for the triumph of Communist ideas, boldly asserted the priority of Moscow innovation over its Western counterpart. For Brik, the Bauhaus was something resembling Vkhutemas.⁴⁰

This new Bolshevik nationalism was profoundly alien to Lissitzky. Moscow Constructivism, which he had been regarding with growing interest, was diluted by the general



PAGE FROM EL LISSITZKY'S SUPREMATISM: THEORY OF TWO SQUARES, BERLIN, SKIF, 1922



EL LISSITZKY, POSTER FOR USSR RUSSISCHE AUSSTELLUNG
ZÜRICH, 1929

European understanding of Constructivism, as was Suprematism. Moholy-Nagy suspected that the people in the Moscow group Lef thought differently from Lissitzky, but it was Lissitzky's interpretation that would become the accepted one for many years. Indeed, at *Konstruktivisten* (*Constructivists*), a large exhibition shown at the Kunsthalle Basel in 1937, works by Lissitzky and Malevich, Mondrian and Rodchenko, Kandinsky and Schwitters were all put under the banner of Constructivism.

Malevich and his students did not accept either Moscow Constructivism or much of Western European Constructivism. Malevich tried to see Moscow Constructivism in the historical context of changes in art. "Constructivism is one of the phenomena of painting movements in art, beginning its development in Russia, during the years of active revolution, headed by a group of young artists and poets. The true belief of Constructivism is that an artwork must be economical, expedient, devoid of aestheticism. Constructivism is all about seeking uses for its form and construction in all materials, utilitarian objects, and things. Much in its form and construction is borrowed from Cubism."⁴¹ The last sentence is quite remarkable, suggesting that Constructivism was at an earlier, less perfected stage of development than was Suprematism.

Lissitzky had left the Russian Soviet Federal Socialist Republic (RSFSR), but he returned to a different country, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), in 1925. The notion of world revolution was being forgotten. He had left feeling that he was a member of Unovis, but for about eighteen months he had sent no news to his former Vitebsk colleagues who had followed Malevich to Petrograd. Lissitzky had begun to work on a different

plane. Malevich had accepted this change as a fait accompli, and Lissitzky, despite his own work and illness, had continued to respond to all of Malevich's requests, whether related to a package or to the organization of a sale in the West. The two discussed how it could have happened that three Suprematist works chosen in Leningrad to be shown at the Russian pavilion of the Venice *Biennale* in 1924 had been included in the catalogue but not exhibited. Lissitzky also offered his help in organizing exhibitions of work by Malevich and Ginkhuk in Germany.

Malevich suggested to Lissitzky that he stay in the West. He didn't think Russia would offer him the same opportunities for his work, especially in publishing. Lissitzky may have been a turncoat, a constructor assembler who was practically in the same company as Rodchenko and Aleksei Gan, but where else could he find such a loyal assistant? The main connection between the two artists remained the idea of publishing a book of Malevich's writings in the West. Lissitzky set himself an incredibly complex task: to create, from Malevich's philosophical, theoretical, and polemical texts, a book that would be accessible to the Western reader. The texts irritated him, were alien to him, but they still worked like magic incantations; overwhelming, all-destroying energy came from them. His translation of the texts turned into an argument with Malevich. He believed that much of the writing was mediocre philosophy. In an era that valued expediency, functionality, and clarity reduced to elementarism, Malevich's global artistic-philosophical project was not easy to understand. It was not a simple task to explain it and to write commentary about it; finally, Lissitzky's approach was to simplify and consciously straighten out the ideas. In doing so, he

accented the general importance of Malevich's formal discoveries, bringing geometrism to the forefront as in the days of Unovis. Lissitzky's famous 1925 essay "A.[rt] and Pangeometry" is in essence an ode to the black square, the point at which the new art began.⁴²

Lissitzky's work in the first half of the 1920s is an immutable and organic part of European art culture. There was much that did not suit him in the Moscow art world, but, a sober practitioner and brilliant inventor, he created a new printing shop. Using the experience of the West and Moscow design of the 1920s, he created a completely new style of exhibition design. He brought in Aleksandr Naumov, Lydia Zharova, and Nikolai Prusakov—former members of Obmokhu—and Klutsis and Senkin—former followers of Malevich in the unsuccessful Moscow iteration of Unovis—to work on the USSR pavilion for *Pressa (International Press Exhibition)* in Cologne in 1928. Everything Lissitzky took on was a success, for his audience was the European public, whom he understood.

The idea of creating a pure, plastic architecture was one of the basic tenets in the work of the Suprematists who united around Malevich. Lissitzky was planning to enter into public discussion with Malevich on the subject. His concept of architecture differed strongly from that presented in Malevich's writings. For Malevich, Western architecture, which he associated with Le Corbusier and the Bauhaus, was too utilitarian, devoid of harmony and purity (understood by Malevich as Platonic perfection). In these arguments, architecture was discussed both in terms of specific works by Modern architects and in terms of architecture in general.

We do not know the details of the break between Lissitzky and Malevich, which took place after their first

sentimental meeting in Leningrad on the way from Germany to Moscow in 1927, but the break was based on principles. They ran into each other again at VOKS (All-Union Society for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries) in Leningrad in 1930, and it was as if nothing had ever happened, as though they were mere acquaintances. Lissitzky could not understand why Malevich was painting again, and his architectons remained alien to him. He did not see in them the embryo of future developments in world architecture. The colorful, joyous world of post-Suprematism, which combined the icon with Impressionism, was opposed to the prosaic world of utilitarianism, but Malevich's architectons seemed to have awaited their hour. If one were to make a Suprematist object from them, it would be Manhattan, only in an ideal form, harmonic and light.

Translated from the Russian by Antonina W. Bouis.

NOTES

1 El Lissitzky, letter to Kazimir Malevich, September 9, 1924, The Foundation Cultural Center Khardzhiev-Chaga, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam; published in the brochure *Pisma Kazimiru Malevichu, El Lissitskomu, i Nikolaiu Puninu s 10-ih godov*, ed. Aleksandra Shatskikh and L. Zykov (Moscow Pinakoteka, 2000).

Letters from the Foundation Cultural Center Khardzhiev-Chaga have been published in Russian by I. Menshova in the journal *Experiment*, vol. 5 (1999); *V krughe malevicha. Soratniki. Ucheniki. Posledovateli v Rossii 1920–1950-ih godov*, exh. cat. (St. Petersburg: State Russian Museum, 2000); and *Malevich o sebe. Sovremenniki o Maleviche. Pisma. Dokumenty. Vospominaniia. Kritika*, 2 vols., compiled by Irina Vakar and Tatiana Mikhienko (Moscow: RA, 2003), among other publications. (For this latter publication, the texts were compared with photocopies of the originals in order to avoid the inevitable minor variations in their transcription, and certain inaccuracies in the commentaries of the two earlier publications were corrected.)

2 Lissitzky, "Information on the Book Artist's Work: Replies to a Questionnaire," in Sophie Lissitzky-Kuppers, *El Lissitzky: Life, Letters, Texts* (Greenwich, Conn.: New York Graphic Society, Ltd., 1968).

3 Malevich, letter to Lissitzky, June 17, 1924, *Experiment*, vol. 5 (1999), p. 153.

4 Malevich, letter to Mikhail Matiushin, January 21, 1920, Manuscript Division, State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow, f. 25, no. 9, p. 26.

5. In the spring of 1919, Malevich had written to the Collegium of Fine Arts, demanding that they annul the sale of his works to the Museum of Painterly Culture. The letter is in my archive; published in Andrei Nakov, *Kazimir Malevichs: Catalogue raisonné* (Paris: Adam Biro, 2002), p. 25. An echo of Malevich's conflicts with Kandinsky is found also in a letter from Malevich to David Shterenberg, February 16, 1921: "Kandinsky and company had locked my square in the Shisselburg Fortress" (M. P.

- Lazarev, *David Shterenberg khudozhnik i vremia. put khudozhnika* [Moscow Galaktika, 1992], p. 158)
- 6 The history of the conflict between Malevich and Shterenberg is discussed in Lazarev, *David Shterenberg* (see n. 5)
- 7 This statement, which is not typical of Lissitzky, suggests the strong, almost hypnotic influence Malevich had on him at this time
- 8 Malevich, letter to Nikolai Punin, October 2, 1920, in *Pisma Kazimiru Malevichu, El Lissitzskomu, i Nikolaiu Puninu s 10-kh godov*, p. 30
- 9 Quoted in Vasilii Rakitin, *Der biblische Anarchist Kasimir Malewitsch kommentiert seine Predigt "Von den neuen Systemen in der Kunst" Malewitsch, Suetin, Tshchaschnik*, exh. cat. (Cologne Galerie Gmurzynska, 1992), p. 249
- 10 *Suprematism: Study for a Curtain*, 1919. Paper, gouache, watercolor, and pencil, 45 × 62.5 cm. State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow.
- 11 Ivan Gavris, *Izobrazitelnoe iskusstvo v Vitebshchyna. Neperiodicheski sbornik Vitebskogo okruzhnogo tovarishchestva kraevedeniia* (Vitebsk, 1928), pp. 169, 171
- 12 See Vasilii Rakitin, *Nikolai Mikhailovich Suetin* (Moscow: RA, 1998) and *Iliia Chashnik Khudozhnik novogo vremeni* (Moscow: RA, 2000).
- 13 RGALI, Moscow, f. 680, op. 1, no. 845, p. 353
- 14 Malevich, letter to Mikhail Gershenzon, April 11, 1920, in *Kazimir Malevich. Sobranie sochinenii v piati tomakh*, vol. 3 (Moscow, Gileia, 2000), p. 34
- 15 Program for Unovis Studios, Vitebsk, manuscript and typescript (1919–21), private archive, St. Petersburg, p. 1. The program was created collectively and then written down and developed by Vera Ermolaeva
- 16 *10-aja Gos. Vystavka. Bespredmetnoe tvorcestvo i Suprematizm (Tenth State Exhibition: Nonobjective Creativity and Suprematism)*, Moscow, 1919
- 17 Program for Unovis Studios, p. 3.
- 18 Malevich, letter to Lissitzky, December 8, 1924, in *Pisma Kazimiru Malevichu, El Lissitzskomu, i Nikolaiu Puninu s 10-kh godov*, p. 13
- 19 Program for Unovis Studios, p. 7
- 20 *Ibid.*, p. 11
- 21 Nina Kogan, "For the Unovis Exhibition," typescript (1922), private archive
- 22 El Lissitzky, "Stante stroiteliam," typescript draft (1920), private archive, p. 1. This text was included in *Almanakh Unovis No. 1*, Manuscript Division, State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow, f. 76, no. 9
- 23 Lissitzky, "Proun," typescript of a lecture delivered at Inkhuk, September 23, 1921, private archive, p. 4
- 24 Ivan Puni, *Sovremenniaia zhivopis* (Berlin, 1923), p. 11
- 25 Malevich, draft for "A Letter to the Dutch Artists" (September 7, 1921), The Foundation Cultural Center Khardzhiev-Chaga, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam
- 26 The Foundation Cultural Center Khardzhiev-Chaga, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam
- 27 Malevich, letter to Lissitzky, June 17, 1924, *Experiment*, vol. 5 (1999), p. 153.
- 28 Malevich, letter to David Shterenberg, December 11, 1920, in Lazarev, *David Shterenberg*, p. 158.
- 29 Lissitzky, letter to Malevich, January 10, 1921, in *V krughe malevicha Soratniki. Ucheniki. Posledovateli v Rossii 1920–1950-kh godov*
- 30 Malevich, undated letter, private archive, Moscow.
- 31 See "Bulletin of the Executive Committee of Moscow State Art Workshops," no. 1 (October 3, 1920), in the Documents section of this publication.
- 32 Gustav Klutis, letter to V. Kulagina, January 6, 1921, private archive, Moscow
- 33 See A. V. Lunacharsky, "Russian Artists in Berlin," *Ogonek*, no. 30 (1927), in the Documents section of this publication
- 34 There are two versions of this painting. This particular version—now in a private collection, is the one included in the current exhibition and is reproduced on page 126 of this publication
- 35 Shterenberg, letter to Malevich, in Lazarev, *David Shterenberg*, pp. 158–160
- 36 The idea for a magazine was supported first of all by G. Zinoviev, who determined in great part Comintern's political line. During Georg Grosz's visit to Soviet Russia, he spoke of the desirability of publishing a progressive art magazine with the Comintern's editorial staff in Berlin or Paris, Grosz, *Ein kleines Ja und grosses Nein* (Hamburg, 1955), p. 170
- 37 Lissitzky, letter to an unidentified recipient, March 1922, private archive. In this letter, Lissitzky discusses the idea of doing a special Russian edition of *Veshch*, an idea that was never realized. For a historical analysis of *Veshch*, see Yu. Molok, "Veshch kak veshch, ili polemika na iazyke grafik," *Pinakoteka*, special issue dedicated to Russian-German art ties, no. 3–4 (1999)
- 38 Program for Unovis Studios
- 39 Adolph Benet, *Techeniia v sovremennoi germanskoi iskusstve*, (Moscow and Leningrad, 1924), pp. 13, 15.
- 40 Both Mayakovsky and Brik attended the *Erste russische Kunstausstellung*, Galerie van Diemen, Berlin. In his article "Vystavka izobrazitel'nogo iskusstva SSSR v Berline," *Krasnaia niva*, January 19, 1923, Mayakovsky wrote that "you cannot judge what is going on in the RSFSR from such an exhibition. Our greatest power is not in paintings." Brik wrote a small article about his visit to the Bauhaus, "Dom stroitelstva," *Ogonek*, no. 48 (1923).
- 41 Malevich, typescript, n.d., private archive. Similar theoretical conclusions were made at Inkhuk regarding other movements in Modern art
- 42 Lissitzky, "A [rt] and Pangeometry," in Lissitzky-Kuppers, *El Lissitzky Life, Letters, Texts*, pp. 348–54



MALEVICH IN HIS "EXPERIMENTAL LABORATORY" AT
THE STATE RUSSIAN MUSEUM, LENINGRAD, CA 1932
State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg

**THE SUPREMATIST COLUMN —
A MONUMENT TO NONOBJECTIVE ART**

Most of Kazimir Malevich's architektons and architectonic models have not survived. For this reason, the recovery of an architekton previously known only through photographs is a remarkable event. This is all the more true of *Suprematist Architectural Model* (1927; page 209), as it appears to be the only surviving architekton column, a form emblematic of Malevich's late architectural work.

Malevich's theoretical and practical work in three-dimensional Suprematism began in the late 1910s and early 1920s, when he abandoned painting in favor of research in architecture and teaching. Malevich announced, and provided the theoretical basis for, the beginning of a new architectural juncture in the development of Suprematism in his booklet *Suprematizm: 34 risunka* (*Suprematism: 34 Drawings*, 1920), in which he declared that "in Suprematism, painting is out of the question; painting has become obsolete, and the painter himself is a preconceived notion of the past."¹ In his *White on White* works of 1917–18, painting reached its limits; a different spatial form opened up, and Suprematism, in search of an ultimate nonobjectivity, entered the sphere of architecture.

In the 1920s, Malevich's interpretation of Suprematism as one of the systems of European architecture gradually changed. He

began to regard it as a scientific method containing the “form-creating” potential for the establishment of a universal plastic language: “Suprematism is only a new method of knowledge, the content of which will be different sensations,” he wrote to Konstantin Rozhdestvensky in 1927; as a “Weltanschauung and ‘world-construction,’” Suprematism would become the basis of a general style for the age, while the Suprematist element that transmitted “the sensation of art” on the plane of the canvas would become an architectural element and formula for a new architectural system.² In his theoretical works of the 1920s, Malevich accentuated the organic link between Suprematist architecture and art: “Contemporary New Art and the sensation of the painterly pointed to the form of the new architecture.”³ Rozhdestvensky, in developing his teacher’s theory, emphasized that the spatial “cosmic” sensation was the most important aspect of Suprematist architecture and painting:

In the spiritual sense, Suprematist painting and Suprematist architecture are the same. Sometimes the birth of Suprematist architecture is linked to the attempts to transfer painterly Suprematism to axonometry—but that is how prouns were born.

But prouns are not Suprematist architecture. Not at all!

Prouns lack what is most important in Suprematism: space filled with the dynamic energy of the life of the cosmos. They only contain Suprematist-like elements—but they are material and heavy; they can be fashioned out of plywood, painted, and mounted on a wall, but they do not radiate spatial energy. Prouns lack the Suprematist disposition.⁴

Malevich’s Suprematist architecture is nonfunctional by design and is independent of any social or economic structures. Architektons transmit a purely plastic sensation and are, in the clever definition of Ernst Kallai, “camouflaged

Suprematist paintings.”⁵ Malevich, however, recognized the use of Suprematism in decorating the “space of life” (porcelain, textiles, interior design, monuments, and so on). In 1929, at his solo exhibition at the State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow, he patiently, and without any sense of irony, explained to the gallery workers that “an architekton is only a composition of stereometric figures. It is a thing of no use. But he has no objection if it is used to decorate a room, or placed in the middle of a square, suitably enlarged. It can serve as a base for a statue or a monument; and if a bird does its business on top of it, he also doesn’t mind.”⁶

In the 1920s, Malevich regarded architecture as equivalent to Modern art, as he believed that the goal of Suprematist architecture—architecture in the grand style—was to re-create the world in accordance with the laws of the new art. He dreamed of a global Suprematist environment in which everything would be subordinate to the Suprematist canon: “All things, our entire world, must be arrayed in Suprematist forms: i.e., fabrics, wallpaper, pots, plates, furniture, shop signs; in short, everything must have Suprematist designs as a new form of harmony.”⁷

Malevich’s early work in three-dimensional Suprematism began at the Vitebsk Popular Art School, but the first architektons date from his time at Ginkhuk (State Institute of Artistic Culture), Leningrad, where, in 1923, “the first three-dimensional [objects] were realized.”⁸ Architectural Suprematism became paramount at Ginkhuk, where Malevich worked on this project with his students, including Nikolai Suetin, Ilia Chashnik, and Lazar Khidekel. In the fall of 1925, a laboratory of Suprematist architecture, known as the laboratory of the “Suprematist Order” and headed by Suetin, was created at Ginkhuk. The

Suprematists concerned themselves with “architecture as an artistic form” and the revelation of the absolute laws of its construction, as opposed to the utilitarian architectural conception of the Constructivists. Malevich’s architectural designs and architektons were first presented at an exhibition at Ginkhuk in May 1924 and at the *International Exhibition of Modern Architecture* in Warsaw in February–March 1926.

In 1923 and 1924, Malevich searched for the laws governing the Suprematist three-dimensional “form-creation” while simultaneously working with three-dimensional models and planes. His planits—axonometric drawings floating in the space of three-dimensional Suprematist models that resemble horizontal architektons—did not precede the first architektons, but were contemporaneous to them. Their titles, such as *Future Planits for Earthlings*, point to the timeless, “cosmic” character of Malevich’s architectural conception. The contrasting “energy of the black and the white” is conveyed in them by the juxtaposition of densely shaded and uncolored light planes. In the architekton, the role of color is reduced to the symbolic square, cross, or circle applied to its planes; in this case, the whiteness of the plaster is like the white background of a Suprematist painting, which corresponds, more than anything else, to the nonobjective character of the architektons.

After the closing of Ginkhuk, Malevich continued his architectural activities at GIII (State Institute of Art History) in Leningrad, where his former students Suetin, Chashnik, Khidekel, V. Vorobiev, and the architect Aleksandr Nikolsky now taught and where the issue of the “color-decoration of new architectural constructions, residential areas, and squares”—in particular, “three-dimensional spatial

ornamentation”—was being addressed.⁹ In 1932 and 1933, the last years of his life, Malevich worked on architektons in the experimental laboratory of the State Russian Museum, Leningrad.

Malevich’s early architektons were mostly horizontal, transmitting a sense of stasis or dynamism and the diffusion or concentration of weight. In the second half of the 1920s, new tendencies appeared. As he became fascinated with the prospect of a “rebirth of the classical spirit”—“I see the beginning of a new classical architecture,” he wrote of Suprematist architecture in 1927¹⁰—he began to move toward new principles of building architektons. Vertical forms became predominant, leading to the architekton column, which had monument motifs and more ornamentation. It was a distinct point of departure. In Malevich’s conception, the column carried within itself a programmatic meaning closely linked to the creation of the “Suprematist Order.”

Suprematist Architectural Model dates from this period. It has a heavy quadrangular base, which contrasts sharply



MALEVICH INSTALLATION AT THE REPRESENTATIVE EXHIBITION OF WORKS BY THE INSTITUTE FOR ARTS AND FUTURE FOR THE USSR ARTS YEAR 1924-1926 GINKHUK, LENINGRAD, JUNE 1926 STATE RUSSIAN MUSEUM, Leningrad

with its light and fragile column. The latter is made up of many narrow, elongated shapes placed on the basic structure to form thin, asymmetrical profiles. By fragmenting the single plaster mass, they visually deprive the material of weight and density. The shift in the coupling of small vertical elements in the upper part, which creates a rhythmic pause, seems to delineate a capital. The work first appeared at the Tretyakov Gallery in 1928, after the artist gave it to the museum. Two years later, the museum acquired another *architekton* by Malevich, *Planit* (1925–26).¹¹ In 1965, both works were transferred to Arkhiv proizvedenii iskusstva (Archive of Works of Art) in Zagorsk. It was thought for a long time that the *architektons* had been lost, but *Suprematist Architectural Model* was returned to the Tretyakov Gallery in 1993.

A phased reconstruction of *Suprematist Architectural Model* was begun several years ago,¹³ based on a photograph of an *architekton* printed from an old glass negative from the Tretyakov Gallery archives¹⁴ as well as other archival materials. In 2002, the Moscow architect Yuri Avvakumov completed the design for the reconstruction and a three-dimensional model of the work. The *architekton* was then dismantled. It consists of three plaster prisms (30.5 × 7 × 7 cm; 29.5 × 7 × 7 cm; and 16.5 × 9 × 9 cm) and seventy-nine small fragments (twenty-one of them 3–5 cm in size; the remainder less than 3 cm). The total height of the three large parts is 76.5 cm, and the lost base (judging from the photograph) was 10 cm high or somewhat less; thus the total height of the *architekton* is about 86.5 cm, making it the tallest of the vertical *architektons* that have been reconstructed.¹⁵

Suprematist Architectural Model is mentioned in the catalogue to *Vystavka priobreteniy Gosvdarstvennoi*

Komissii po priobreteniyam proizvedeniy izobrazitel'nogo iskusstva za 1927–1928 (Exhibition of Acquisitions of Works by Persons Working in the Fine Arts in 1927–1928), which took place at the Tretyakov Gallery in November–December 1928. The entry in the catalogue reads as follows: “No. 384. ‘Suprematist *Architekton*.’ Plaster. 86 × 30 × 30. Acquired in 1927–1928.” The *architekton* had been brought from Malevich’s studio to Moscow as early as the summer of 1928, a few months before the start of the exhibition, as can be seen from a July 1928 list of works in the exhibition room of Vkhutein (Higher Artistic-Technical Institute): “No. 48, Malevich, K. S., ‘Suprematist *Architekton*,’ plaster. Inventory no. 155. Dismantled, in two boxes.”¹⁶ According to records, the *architekton* was bought for 600 rubles in December 1928 and allocated to the Tretyakov Gallery.¹⁷

The *architekton* received its present name after its arrival at the Tretyakov Gallery.¹⁸ In the purchasing commission’s documents, it is referred to as “Suprematist *Architekton*,” with the further explanation “architectural model” or “architectural maquette.” In the museum’s inventory book, it is also referred to by this name, and next to the entry is a note in pencil: “the sculpture is disassembled.” The Tretyakov Gallery never exhibited the *architekton*, not even at a solo exhibition of Malevich’s work that opened in November 1929, at which four large and twenty-two small *architektons* brought from Leningrad were exhibited. The explanation for this can be found in a “report on the discovery of inadequacy in storage” at the Tretyakov Gallery, dated October 8, 1929,¹⁸ which describes the damage sustained by the *architekton* shortly before the start of the exhibition: “Pieces of the plaster parts of K. S. Malevich’s *architekton* have been broken off—they are on

the floor next to the base of the architekton. The damage occurred when the pedestal was moved during electrical wiring."¹⁹ From this description, it can be inferred that the architekton had been assembled, probably for the exhibition, when it was damaged. There is no information as to whether it was repaired after the damage occurred.

In 1932, Malevich was able to mount a large-scale exhibition of his architektons as part of *Khudozhniki RSFSR za 15 let (Artists of the RSFSR over the Past Fifteen Years)* at the State Russian Museum. Malevich's installation, which was presented in its own hall, was not only a summation of his work on architektons, but it also heralded a new architectural conception. The architectural part of the exhibition was dominated by majestic vertical architektons: architekton columns and stepped structures swept upward, each crowned by a human figure. The enormous importance accorded by Malevich to the theme of the monument during those years was also reflected in the names of the works: *Column of the Monument of the Land of the Soviets*, *Themes of Architectural Monuments a, b, c, e*, and so on. These late architektons differed from the earlier works in their spatial correlation and proportions. The vertical architektons became higher and lighter, as if turning toward space. Their drawn-out forms, high above the horizon, gravitate toward the column. It is as though the architektons had drawn space into their very structure. In place of the large static planes and heavy three-dimensional forms of earlier architektons, there was now a completely different plastic image, which evoked classical associations. Indeed, the exhibition reflected Malevich's desire to create a modern classicism. The multiplaned spatial construction of the architekton, the strict correlation of complex geometrical forms (with one

another and with the whole), the altered rhythm of horizontal and vertical, and the general movement toward weightlessness were the hallmarks of a new stage of Suprematist architecture, freed, in Malevich's conception, from the force of gravity and the pressure of weight. The architektons lost their autonomy, submitting to the rule of the ensemble. They formed, at the exhibition, a single Suprematist architectural milieu, representing an ideal city that also included painting in its space.

S. I. Soloveichik, Ivan Kliun's daughter, recalls Malevich's view of his late works: "In 1932, Malevich showed me the maquettes of his architektons and said that the previous ones . . . were unsuccessful and that it was important to strive upward toward space. However, he didn't consider his new architektons to be perfect; in his view, they were only attempts to find the one and only correct solution and they lacked lightness and were too unwieldy."²⁰

Suprematist Architectural Model would not have been out of place at the Russian Museum exhibition, as its plastic qualities anticipated, to a certain extent, Malevich's future work. In fact, Malevich had intended to include it in



MALEVICH'S INSTALLATION IN "THE FIFTEEN ARTISTS OF THE RSFSR OVER THE PAST FIFTEEN YEARS" AT THE RUSSIAN MUSEUM, LENINGRAD, 1932
State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg

the exhibition: archival materials show that it appeared in the show's original list of works. Minutes from a July 1930 meeting of the Jury for Sculpture at the Tretyakov Gallery note, "The question of exhibiting [*Suprematist Architectural Model*] is to be decided by a special commission."²¹ Evidently, this commission decided to exhibit the piece, as it is included in a list of sculptures from the Tretyakov Gallery accepted for the exhibition by the selection committee in September or November 1930, as "No. 23 'Suprematist Architectonic' 1927."²² Unfortunately, the *architekton* did not become part of the exhibition; along with some other works, it was removed from the list and was left in Moscow.

There is very little information on what happened to Malevich's *architektons* in the Tretyakov Gallery's collection from the 1930s to the 1960s. Practically the only source of information regarding the presence of the works in the collection are the museum's inventory lists from the 1930s through the 1950s. Various ledgers also contain entries made after inventories: in the registration book, next to "Suprematist Architectural Model," there is a stamp that reads "Department of Soviet Art. Checked on September 21, 1934," and in the inventory ledger, next to "Suprematist Architectural Model," is the note, "Checked 1952."

The 1950s and 1960s were difficult years for the Tretyakov Gallery's avant-garde collection. In the late 1940s, the works of many artists, including Malevich, were excluded from the museum's catalogue of Soviet art. Among the works excluded were "5636/26 *Architekton*" and "Inv. 11997 *Suprematist Architekton*."²³ Paintings were also excluded from the catalogue, among them Malevich's *Girl with a Red Staff* (*Sketch for a Portrait*) [*Girl*

with a Comb in Her Hair], 1932–33), *Doctor Mabuzo* (1922–27), a movie poster, and *Black Square* (1915). The titles of works not listed in the catalogue of the museum's principal collection were entered into a special inventory book, which consisted of three sections: "Paintings, drawings, sculptures of low artistic merit," "Decorative arts," and "Formalist works." It was noted that "the archiving of works from this roster would not pose the same difficulties as the archiving of works from the main collection."²⁴ Boris Vladimirovich Ioganson, who became the museum's director in May 1951, took an active part in broadening this activity by heading the Commission on the Selection of Works of No Exhibitional or Artistic Merit. The commission determined that works deemed "of no exhibitional or artistic merit" would be stored in the Central Archive of the Committee on Matters Pertaining to the Arts in Zagorsk or in nonspecialized provincial museums, among other places.²⁶ This statement laid the foundation for the archiving of many of the Tretyakov Gallery's works, including Malevich's *architektons*.

In the early 1950s, all of the museum's works were divided into four categories, depending on their perceived importance, with those deemed the least important by the commission placed in the fourth category.²⁷ All of Malevich's works were placed in the third and fourth categories, with the exception of his painting *Spring: Garden in Bloom* (1904), which was included in the second category. It is enough to name a few of the twentieth-century paintings relegated to the fourth category to convey their real importance: Mikhail Larionov's *Soldier Resting* (1911) and *Waitress* (n.d.); Natalia Goncharova's *Washing Linen* (1910) and *Peacock* (n.d.); Vasily Kandinsky's *Composition No. 7* (1913); Vladimir Tatlin's *Nude* (1913) and *Board No. 1*

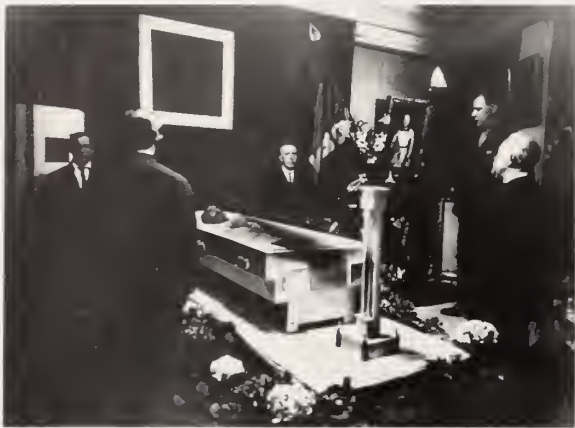
(n.d.); Marc Chagall's *Above the City* (1917–18); and paintings by Viktor Borisov-Musatov, Aristarkh Lentulov, Liubov Popova, Olga Rozanova, and Nadezhda Udaltsova. There were also four paintings by Malevich: *Through Station. Kuntsevo* (ca. 1913), *Dynamic Suprematism* (1916), *Architekton* (n.d.),²⁸ and *Woman with a Rake* (1928–32). The list of Soviet paintings in this category coincides with those in a contemporary exhibition of paintings from the 1920s and 1930s at the Tretyakov Gallery: Petr Viliams's *Installation of the Workshop* (n.d.) and *Female Acrobat* (n.d.); Aleksandr Deneika's *Ballgame* (1932) and *Before Lowering into the Mine* (1925); Pavel Kuznetsov's *Pushbol* (n.d.); Yurii Pimenov's, *Give to Heavy Industry* (1927); Aleksandr Samokhvalov's *Girl with the Kernel* (n.d.); Aleksandr Tyshler's *Dance with a Red Veil* (n.d.); Pavel Filonov's *Faces* (1919); a "theatrical panel" (n.d.) by Chagall; and David Shterenberg's *Still Life with Herring* (1918), among others. Three works by Malevich were also included in this section: *Black Square* (1929), *Girl with the Red Staff*, and *Doctor Mabuzo*.

The list of works in the third category is also astounding: Kuznetsov's *Blue Fountain* (n.d.); Larionov's *Morning in the Barracks* (n.d.); Kandinsky's *White Oval* (1919); Chagall's *The Wedding* (1918); Deneika's *New Workshop Building Sites* (n.d.); Konstantin Istomin's *Vuzovki College Girls* (n.d.); Petr Konchalovsky's *The Violinist* (n.d.); Kuzma Petrov-Vodkin's *At the Samovar* (n.d.); Robert Falk's *Beautiful Furniture* (n.d.); Shterenberg's *Aniska* (n.d.), and many other works without which it is impossible to imagine the museum's collection. Four of Malevich's paintings fell into this category: *Black Square* (1915), *Haymaking* (1928–29), *Sisters* (1910), and *Dressing Table Box* (n.d.). The list of Soviet sculpture in this category consisted of

eighty-five entries; entry no. 40 (inv. no. 11997) was Malevich's "Architekton."²⁹

In 1953, the Tretyakov Gallery submitted all of the requisite documentation to the Committee on the Arts and began an extensive correspondence with Glavistustvo (Chief Administration Authority for Visual Arts) regarding the archiving of works.³⁰ Many of the works to be archived were in the third and fourth categories. Fortunately, the Zagorsk archive was unable to accept a large number of works; the process became drawn out, and there was some hope that it would drown in paperwork. However, in 1954 the archive agreed to accept a limited number of paintings and drawings. The museum was notified that "at the present time, it is possible to transfer to the Archive of Works of Art up to 100 paintings no larger than one meter, no more than three rolled-up canvases of large paintings, and no more than 1,000 drawings."³¹

The transfers to Zagorsk began only in 1957. The order in which paintings were transferred was most likely decided by the staff of the Tretyakov Gallery. Thanks to them, the transfer did not begin with first-class works and thus was less devastating than it could have been. The museum's collection of avant-garde paintings was practically unaffected, but there were still very serious losses, especially in 1964 and 1965.³² An order by the Ministry of Culture on April 9, 1965 granted the Tretyakov Gallery authorization to transfer 2,632 works to the Zagorsk archive, including both of Malevich's architektons.³³ In the transfer papers—the last mention of the architektons in the museum's documents—the works are cited as follows: "'Suprematist Architectural Model' plaster 11997" and "'Planit' plaster 5464 KrTG."³⁴ Next to the word "Planit" is a question mark. The archiving of the practically



GUARD OF HONOR AT MALEVICH'S COFFIN IN
LENINGRAD, MAY 1935
State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg

nonexistent *Planit* was at best a formality. *Suprematist Architectural Model* was practically in ruins when it was returned to the Tretyakov Gallery in 1993, after almost thirty years. Hopefully, after it has been restored and rebuilt, it will become part of the museum's twentieth-century art collection.

On the reverse side of one of the old photographs of an architekton belonging to the Tretyakov Gallery, there is a note written by Malevich: "Suprematist column vertical Suprematism. A monument to the new nonobjective art. K. Malevich 1927."³⁵ It was this architekton that he intended to be his tombstone. The monument to the new art was to become Malevich's monument. "When I die," he wrote to his friend Kliun, "all the artists of the world, and those who know me, must bury me in Barvikha . . . and put on my grave a tower in the form of that column that is in the Tretyakovka . . . with a turret, inside of which a telescope will be placed to watch Jupiter."³⁶

Translated from the Russian by Daniel Rishik.

Notes

1. Kazimir Malevich: *Sobranie sochinenii v piati tomakh*, vol. 1 (Moscow: Gileia, 1995), p. 189.

2. Malevich, letter to Konstantin Rozhdestvensky, Berlin, April 21, 1927, in Vasilii Rakitin, *Konstantin Rozdesvjenski: Unter dem Zeichen des Roten Quadrats*, exh. cat. (Cologne: Galerie Gmurzynska, 1993), p. 30.

3. Kazimir Malevich: *Sobranie sochinenii v piati tomakh*, vol. 2 (Moscow: Gileia, 1998), p. 122.

4. Rozhdestvensky, "O suprematisme," in Rakitin, *Konstantin Rozdesvjenski*, p. 30.

5. Ernst Kallai, "Kazimir Malevich," *Kunstblatt*, no. 7 (1927).

6. Quoted in L. V. Rozental, "Nepriimechatelnye dostovernosti," *Minushee* 23 (1998), p. 96.

7. Quoted in M. Kunin, "Ob Unovise," *Iskusstvo*, nos. 2–3 (1921).

8. See Kazimir Malevich: *Sobranie sochinenii v piati tomakh*, vol. 1, p. 309. This date is confirmed in Rozhdestvensky's memoirs: he notes that when he joined Malevich's department in the fall of 1923, work on architektons was already in full swing.

9. Vasilii Rakitin, *Nikolai Mikhailovich Suetin* (Moscow: RA, 1998).

10. Kazimir Malevich: *Sobranie sochinenii v piati tomakh*, vol. 2, p. 127.

11. *Planit* came to the museum in 1930, following *Vystavka proizvedenii tsentralnoi gosudarstvennoi komissii po priobredeniym proizvedenii isobrazitel'nikh iskusstv* (*Exhibition of Works of the Central State Commission for the Procurement of Works in the Fine Arts*, 1928–29). *Planit* is no. 5 125 in the exhibition's catalogue: "Architekton. Planit—monument motif." Painted plaster. Workshop ("4 iskusstva") Acquisition 1929–1930." Both the Tretyakov Gallery and the Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts, Moscow, wanted to acquire the work. At the meeting of the State Commission for the Acquisition of Works Produced by Persons Working in the Fine Arts, this matter was decided in favor of the Tretyakov Gallery RGALI (Russian

State Archive of Literature and Art, f 645, op. 1, ed. khr 485, l 70) Unfortunately, no photographs of this *arkhitekton* have survived. In the museum's documents, there is an entry on the condition of *Planit*, dated November 27, 1950 "damaged, only separate fragments remain" (OR GTG [Tretiakov Gallery Archive], f 8/IV, ed. khr 460, l 19) That is, by this time, the work practically did not exist

12 Kazimir Malevich *Sobranie sochinenii v piati tomakh*, vol 2, p. 124

13. The students of the Moscow Architectural Institute (under the direction of E B Ovsiannikova) created preliminary computerized versions of the reconstruction as well as several paper maquettes on the basis of drawings and photographs. N. L. Rozenvasser of the Tretiakov Gallery's sculpture department and a restorer, L. V. Levko, took measurements of the *arkhitekton* and made drawings and paper tracings of the fragments, they revealed Malevich's marks and traces of attachments of the parts. Precise photographs were taken.

14 This photograph is reproduced in S. O. Khan-Magomedov, *Pioniere der sowjetischen Architektur* (Vienna: Löcker, 1983), fig. 48 ("K. S. Malevich, 'Vertical Arkhitekton,' ser. 1920s"), and in *Malevich: Khudozhnik i teoretik (Malevich. Artist and Theoretician)*, Moscow: Izd-vo "Sovetskii khudozhnik," 1990), ill. 138 ("K. S. Malevich, 'Arkhitekton,' 1926 (?) Lost"). In S. O. Khan-Magomedov's book *Pionery sovetskogo dizaina* (Moscow: Galart, 1995), strp. 56, the *arkhitekton* is mistakenly attributed to Suetin ("N. M. Suetin, 'Vertical Arkhitekton,' 1927")

15 The height of the *arkhitekton Gora* (1923 [1989]), reconstructed at the Musée national d'art moderne, Paris, is 85.2 cm. See *Malévitch. Architectures, peintures, dessins. Collections du Musée national d'art moderne*, exh. cat. (Paris: CGPMNAM, 1980), p. 64

16 Inventory of paintings, sculptures, and drawings in Vkhutein's exhibition room, July 7, 1928, RGALI, f 645, op. 1, ed. khr 482, l 95

17 Minutes of the Commission for the Acquisition of Works Produced by Persons Working in the Fine Arts, December 21, 1928, RGALI, f 645, op. 1, ed. khr 482, l 164 (ob.) List of acquired works produced by persons working in the fine arts in 1928–29, RGALI, f 645, op. 1, ed. khr 482, l 83–85 List of works transferred by Glaviskusstvo to the Tretiakov Gallery, RGALI, f 645, op. 1, ed. khr 482, l 79

18. Entry in the Tretiakov Gallery's registration book. The height indicated there, 86.5 cm, differs by half a centimeter from that given in the catalogue entry

19 OR GTG, f 8/IV, ed. khr. 54, l. 20.

20. S. I. Soloveichik (Kliunkova), "Malevich Kazimir Severinovich," OR GTG, f 178, ed. khr. 11, l 11

21. Minutes no. 1 of the meeting of the Jury for Sculpture in the Tretiakov Gallery, July 25, 1930, RGALI, f 643, op. 1, ed. khr. 8, l 50.

22 List of works of art accepted by the selection commission from artists, museums, and institutions to be shown at the exhibition, RGALI, f 643, op. 1, ed. khr. 11, l 142

23 List of works not included in the catalogue of Soviet art, State Tretiakov Gallery, OR GTG, f 8/IV, ed. khr. 87, l 11 (ob.)

24 Orders, minutes, documents, and certificates on inventory taking and accounting of museum valuables, 1949–53, OR GTG, f 8/IV, ed. khr 386, l 12

25 Order no. 90, May 5, 1950, OR GTG, f 8/IV, ed. khr. 386, l 14

26. Minutes of the Commission on the Selection of Works of No Exhibitional or Artistic Value, 1951–52, OR GTG, f 8/IV, ed. khr 392

27. List of works from the State Tretiakov Gallery collection (first through fourth categories), OR GTG, f 8/IV, ed. khr 89–92

28 The second *Dynamic Suprematism* was listed as "Arkhitekton (x, m, 80 x 80 Inv. 11967)"

29 List of works from the State Tretiakov Gallery collection (third category), OR GTG, f 8/IV, ed. khr 91, l 45

30. Correspondence with Glaviskusstvo on the archiving of exhibits without any exhibitional or artistic value

31 O. Esipova (head of the Zagorsk Archive of Works of Art), letter to P. I. Lebedev (director of the State Tretiakov Gallery), October 28, 1954, OR GTG, f 8/IV, ed. khr 393, l 15

32 Some of the museum's archived works were transferred from Zagorsk to other museums. For example, Aristarkh Vasilievich Lentulov's *Port Tuapse* (n.d.) went by to the Abramtsevo Museum; N. V. Kashin's *Trial in Samarkand* (n.d.) went to the Nukuss Museum, and Aleksei Alekseevich Morgunov's *Demonstration* (n.d.), *Portrait of a Man* (n.d.), *In the Butcher Shop* (n.d.), and other works went to the GRM [Gosudarstvennyi russkii muzei]. Several paintings were returned to the Tretiakov Gallery in the 1980s, including Roman Matveyevich Semashkevich's *Avto* (n.d.), G. N. Rublev's *Seamstresses* (n.d.), and G. N. Trauberg's *Rally in the Lane* (n.d.)

33 Order of the Ministry of Culture of the USSR No. 1411-3/36, April 9, 1965, OR GTG, f 8/IV, ed. khr 234, l 178

34 Document no. 5 regarding the transfer of exhibits from the Tretiakov Gallery, June 5, 1965, OR GTG, f 8/IV, ed. khr 234 The *arkhitektons* appear in the list of decorative and applied art being transferred, along with various other exhibits, such as a plate with an engraved portrait of Stalin, porphyry vases from the Hermitage, and a drill made of stainless steel (a gift from a machine-building plant). According to this document, 2,366 works were transferred to the Zagorsk archive, consisting of 86 paintings, 2,265 drawings, 6 sculptures, and 9 items of decorative and applied arts.

35 The photograph is in the collection of the Foundation Khardzhiev-Chaga/Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam] I would like to thank Vasilii Rakitin for making this photograph available to me

36 Malevich, letter to Ivan Kljun, June 2, 1931, private archive. Moscow See the Documents section in this publication.



MALEVICH LYING IN STATE IN HIS APARTMENT, LENINGRAD.
MAY 17-18, 1935
State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg

MALEVICH'S SUPREMATISM AND RELIGION

It is popularly believed that the artistic leanings of the Russian avant-garde were based on revolutionary politics, but this is a mistaken belief, for it fails to take into account that most avant-garde works were in fact created in the late 1900s and early 1910s—several years before the revolution of 1917. Although the Russian avant-garde movement was heavily influenced by Western art—Paul Cézanne and Post-Impressionism, Futurism, and Cubism in particular—it was also much influenced by its own national traditions during this time. Religious art (church architecture, icons, frescoes) and traditional crafts (wood carving, ceramics, embroidery) enjoyed an unexpected revival in Russia in the early 1910s. Examples of religious and folk art were collected, studied, and exhibited alongside works of high art. The cosmic nature of Old Russian and folk art helped the masters of the avant-garde advance deeper into the realms of nonobjectivity, a process aided also by the religious beliefs typically held, in varying degrees, by the majority of Russian avant-garde artists.

Malevich was no exception. In the middle of the first decade of the 1900s, he painted a series of compositions for a fresco, collectively titled *Studies for a Fresco Painting*, in which he represented the Gospel subjects of the Transfiguration, the

Gethsemane Prayer, and the Resurrection in a Symbolist style. In one of these works, *Self-Portrait*, Malevich depicted himself as God. This “Messianic” approach to his role in society and art accompanied the artist all his life. Malevich viewed himself as a Messiah, called not only to save, but also to transform the world, and he regarded his theoretical writings as “new Gospels in art.”¹

Suprematism largely expressed Malevich’s personal interpretation of the Creation. While the term “Suprematism” derives from the Latin word *supremus*, Malevich understood the concept of “supremacy” in a far broader and more profound way. In 1916, as he was working to establish Suprematism among the other avant-garde movements, Malevich likened himself to Christ in a letter written to fellow avant-garde artist Mikhail Matiushin:

Christ revealed Heaven on Earth, putting an end to space and establishing two extremes, two poles, no matter where they are—in oneself or “there.” We shall not walk past a thousand poles, like we walked past billions of grains of sand on the river and sea shores. The space is more than the sky, stronger and mightier; our new book is the doctrine of the space of the wilderness.²

Here he introduced the concept of the Revelation to help explain his own theory of physical space as a cosmos, a theory that is manifested in his Suprematist compositions in which geometric forms appear on a light, “fathomless” background—in a space that is, in his opinion, “more than the sky.”³

Reflecting on art in general in the late 1910s, Malevich published an essay entitled *Bog ne skinut: Iskusstvo, Tserkov, Fabrika* (*God Is Not Cast Down: Art, Church, Factory*).⁴ The very title of the work and its terminology are permeated with religious pathos. (It is interesting to

note that the artist was addressing the relationship between religion and society in the second half of the 1910s, despite the de facto prohibition of religion and the church in Russia following the Bolshevik Revolution. In fact, Malevich’s tenets confirming his own egocentric religiousness in a cosmic context accompanied the artist’s entire oeuvre from before 1917 right up until his death in 1935.)

Malevich offered his own interpretation of the Creation in *God Is Not Cast Down*:

God decided to build the world in order to free himself from it forever, in order to be free, and to assume the entire Nothing or eternal rest as a great thinking essence, for there was nothing else to think about—everything was perfect. He wanted to give the same to man on Earth. Man, however, was unable to endure the [social] system and transgressed it. Man left its captivity and the whole system collapsed, its weight falling on him. In other words, feeling the weight inside him, God turned the system into dust. The weight became light. He “unweighted” it, placing man in an unknown system.⁵

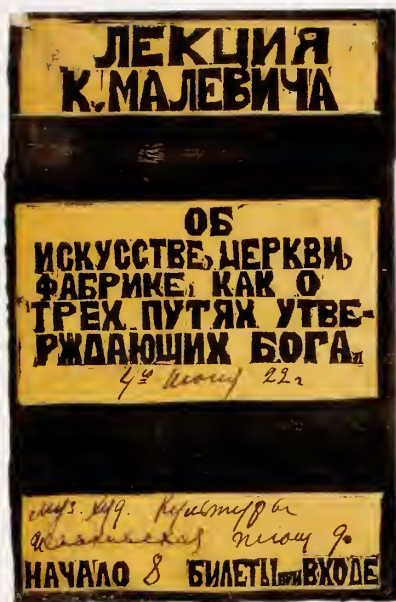
Malevich’s “unknown system” is the world—the universe in which man lives—and Suprematism is the artistic expression of the existence of man in this universe. “The weight,” designated by color and form and dispersed throughout the universe, is what constitutes the monochrome Suprematist canvas.

Why did Malevich return so often to the black square throughout his career? Was it the urge to reproduce his original masterpiece, or did these repetitions manifest a particular idea? The artist’s own writings show that his approach to the black square in 1920 differed cardinally from his stance in 1913, when his seminal canvas first appeared in a performance of the Futurist opera *Pobeda nad solntsem* (*Victory Over the Sun*) as part of the sets

that launched Suprematism. The black square now acquired not just aesthetic significance, but spiritual significance. In a 1920 letter to Mikhail Gershenzon, Malevich wrote: "This is the form of a new living organism. . . . It is not painting; it is something else." He continued: "I had the idea that were humanity to draw an image of the Divinity after its own image, perhaps the black square is the image of God as the essence of His perfection on a new path for today's fresh beginning."⁶ This may suggest why Malevich repeated the black square several times: its form and color appear to have best expressed the artist's understanding of the image of God in the relationship between man and the universe.

Malevich was, in essence, creating a new type of icon. Unlike Russian Orthodox icon painters who illustrated biblical texts, however, Malevich excluded all narrative from his compositions. He minimized the images, reducing them to pure forms, and he monumentalized the squares, circles, and crosses employed by icon painters in the clothes of the saints, elevating them to the level of independent, multisignificant symbols. By placing a square, circle, or cross on a white or gray background, Malevich was returning to the canons of Old Russian art, reinterpreting them in his own original manner. In Russian icons, a white background traditionally symbolizes purity, sanctity, and eternity, while black represents the chasm, hell, and darkness. As in *Victory Over the Sun*, in which the characters battle against the Sun, the symbol of life, Malevich employed the *Black Square* to incarnate the perfection of the modern God. Implying more than just the movement of contemporary art beyond the bounds of "Nothing" or traditional figurative art, Malevich's oeuvre was reclaiming the icon for art, in a new, updated form.





POSTER FOR MALEVICH'S LECTURE "CONCERNING ART, CHURCH, FACTORY AS THREE WAYS OF CONFIRMING GOD," MUSEUM OF ARTISTIC CULTURE, PETROGRAD, JUNE 4, 1922
State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg

Judging by the thoughts expressed in *God Is Not Cast Down*, Malevich was engaged in a quest for a "new path for today's fresh beginning" (a phrase he used in his 1920 letter to Gershenzon) and sought a universal artistic language that would express the new religion. By creating black, red, and white squares, Malevich believed that he had found a way to incarnate the universe in new forms of art. He was convinced that these forms could help him to construct a new "architecture"—in other words, a new relationship between man and the world, a new religion.

Malevich's writings and his ambitious attempt to create a new religion did not pass by his contemporaries unnoticed. Reviewing *God Is Not Cast Down* in 1922, Boris Arvatov, an advocate of Constructivism, wrote:

I have continuously pointed out that Suprematism is the most detrimental reaction under the banner of the revolution, i.e., a doubly harmful reaction. Left-wing art in the form of its truly revolutionary group (Constructivism) should not hesitate in snipping the cord still linking it to Suprematism. After Malevich's candid thrusts, even the doubters, even the short-sighted, will discern the black face of the old art behind the mask of the red square.⁷

The critic was right when he wrote that for Malevich in the 1920s, Suprematism had become a vehicle for the creation of a new religion. As the artist himself wrote in a letter dated April 11, 1920:

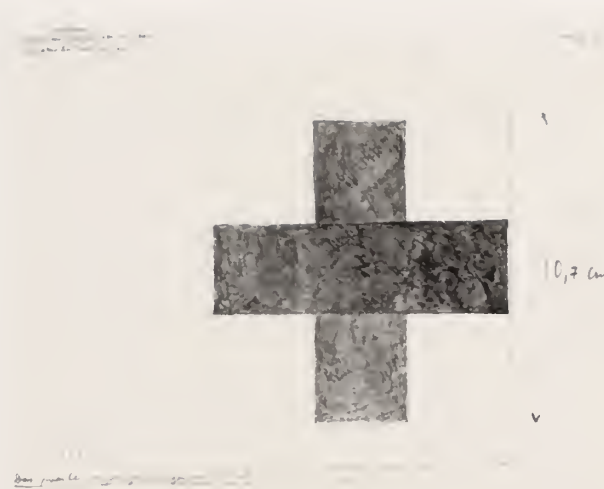
For many years I was concerned with my movement in colors, leaving the religion of the spirit aside, and twenty-five years have passed, and now I have returned or rather I have entered into the religious World; I do not know why it happened so. *I visit churches, look at the saints and the entire spiritual world in action, and now I see in myself, and perhaps in the world as a whole, that the time is coming for a change of religions.*⁸

Reflecting on religion, Malevich came to the conclusion that the church and the factory—implying the organization of Socialist society, with its palaces and clubs—were extremely similar:

The walls of both are decorated with countenances and portraits, also arranged according to merit or rank. Martyrs or heroes exist in both the former and the latter; their names are also listed as saints. There is no difference; on all sides, everything is identical, for the question is identical, the aim is identical, and the meaning is the quest for God.⁹

Malevich wrote these words in 1920. Shortly after, he virtually abandoned painting, only returning to it in the late 1920s after a trip to Germany. During this sabbatical from painting, the artist spent a lot of time reflecting on the fate of Suprematism. Writing from Germany to Konstantin Rozhdestvensky, Malevich stated: “Nonobjective art stands without windows and doors, like a pure sensation in which life, like a homeless tramp, desires to spend the night.”¹⁰

When Malevich returned to Russia and once again took up painting, he chose to address subjects from “life,” working particularly intensely on his *Peasant Cycle*. Many paintings from this period represent a form of Suprematism into which the artist has “breathed life.” While their incorporeality and absence of weight suggest the Suprematism of the mid-1910s, their allusions to subject matter derived from the necessity of opening “windows and doors,” getting closer to life, and using color and form to incarnate a pure sensation of space, the universe, and man in the universe. Malevich’s peasants of the late 1920s and early 1930s are unreal. They are “universal” people—the same people of the future (*budetlyane*) from *Victory Over the Sun*, only cleansed of the elements of buffoonery and the grotesque pervading



THE THIRD BASIS. SUPREMATIST ELEMENT PAGE DESIGN
FOR THE NONOBJECTIVE WORLD (MÜNICH: ALBERT LANGEN
VERLAG, 1927)
1927, pen and ink on paper, 8 1/4 x 10 1/2 inches (21.6 x 26.7 cm)
Kupferstichkab. nett. Öffentliche Kunstsammlung Basel



MALEVICH PAINTING *GIRL WITH A RED STAFF*, APRIL 3, 1933
Photograph by Nikolai Suetin

Malevich's costume designs for the Futurist opera. In returning to figurative art, Malevich did not engage in self-mimicry, but rather sought new paths for Suprematism, realizing and accepting the changes taking place in life. Suprematism was transformed and perfected, reincarnated in a new aesthetic, which was, for Malevich, a form of religion. The characters he created are solemn, majestic, and faceless—worthy of inclusion in an iconostasis of modern heroes and martyrs. The *Peasant Cycle* thus embodies the theme of a new religion and a new people led by God toward a new life.

No one knows what Malevich's *Socialist City* project looked like. The artist is known to have donated his designs and writings on the subject to Glavnauka, the official body overseeing Soviet art and science, in 1932. Judging by several studies in the State Russian Museum in St. Petersburg, the artist intended to create something akin to an iconostasis depicting various representatives of the urban population. As in his *Peasant Cycle*, the artist may also have wanted to continue the concept of Suprematism in new forms. From the black square to this late project, Malevich thus employed the artistic ideology of the Orthodox Church to create a revolutionary new art in the twentieth century.

Notes

- 1 Kazimir Malevich, *Bog ne skinut* *Iskusstvo. Tserkov Fabrika* in *Kazimir Malevich. Sobranie sochinenii v piati tomakh*, vol. I (Moscow: Gileia, 1995)
- 2 Quoted in E. F. Kovtun, "Pismo K. S. Malevicha M. V. Matushinu," in *Ezhegodnik Rukopisnogo otdela Pushkinskogo doma na 1974 g.* (Leningrad: Nauka, 1976), pp. 177–95
- 3 Malevich, *Bog ne skinut. Iskusstvo. Tserkov Fabrika*
- 4 Dated 1920 by Malevich, *God Is Not Cast Down: Art, Church, Factory* was published in Vitebsk in 1922. The artist had clearly reflected on many of the essay's themes earlier than this, however, as is evident in Malevich's letters to Mikhail Gershenzon from 1918 to 1920 (The letters, now in the collection of the Khardzhiev-Chaga Foundation, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, appear in Aleksandra Shatskikh, comp., *Chernyi kvadrat* [St. Petersburg: Azbuka, 2001].)
- 5 Malevich, *Bog ne skinut. Iskusstvo. Tserkov Fabrika*, p. 246.
- 6 Malevich, letter to Mikhail Gershenzon, March 20, 1920, in Shatskikh, comp., *Chernyi kvadrat*, pp. 438–39.
- 7 Boris Arvatov, "Malevich. Bog ne skinut (Iskusstvo. Tserkov. Fabrika)," *Pechat i revoliuciia*, no. 7 (1922), pp. 343–44.
- 8 Malevich, letter to Gershenzon, April 11, 1920, in Shatskikh, comp., *Chernyi kvadrat*, p. 441. Italics added.
- 9 Malevich, *Bog ne skinut. Iskusstvo. Tserkov Fabrika*, p. 248.
- 10 Malevich, letter to Konstantin Rozhdestvensky, May 7, 1927, in *Kazimir Malevich in the Russian Museum* (St. Petersburg: Palace Editions, 2000), p. 395.

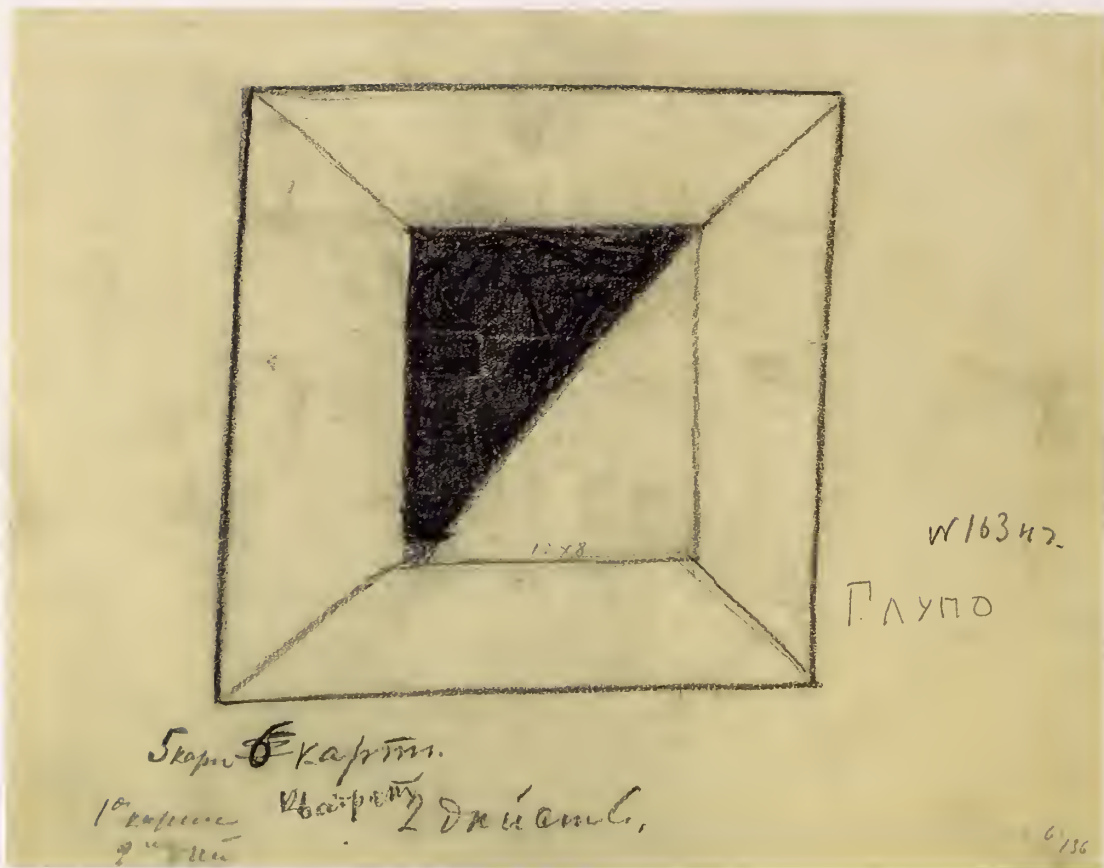


STUDY FOR THE DÉCOR OF VICTORY OVER THE SUN,
ACT 1, SCENE 1
1913, pencil on paper, 10¼ × 7¾ inches (25.9 × 20.2 cm)
St. Petersburg State Museum of Theatre and Music
Inv. No. KP 5199/164



STUDY FOR THE DECOR OF VICTORY OVER THE SUN ACT 1 SCENE 3
1913 pencil on paper 6 1/2 x 8 inches (17 x 22 cm)
St. Petersburg State Museum of Theatre and Music
Inv. No. ГИМ 3569/549

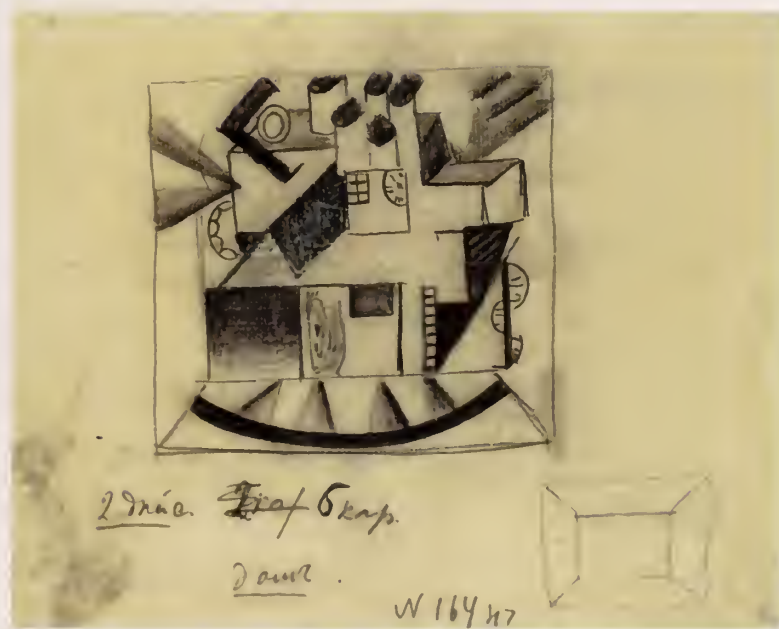
STUDY FOR THE DECOR OF VICTORY OVER THE SUN ACT 1 SCENE 2
1913 pencil on paper 6 1/2 x 8 inches (17 x 22 cm)
St. Petersburg State Museum of Theatre and Music
Inv. No. КР 5199/165



STUDY FOR THE DECOR OF VICTORY OVER THE SUN,
ACT 2, SCENE 5
1913, pencil on paper, 8 3/4 x 10 3/4 inches (21.5 x 27.5 cm)
St. Petersburg State Museum of Theatre and Music
Inv. No. KP 5199/166



разработка 4 картина 16/11/11



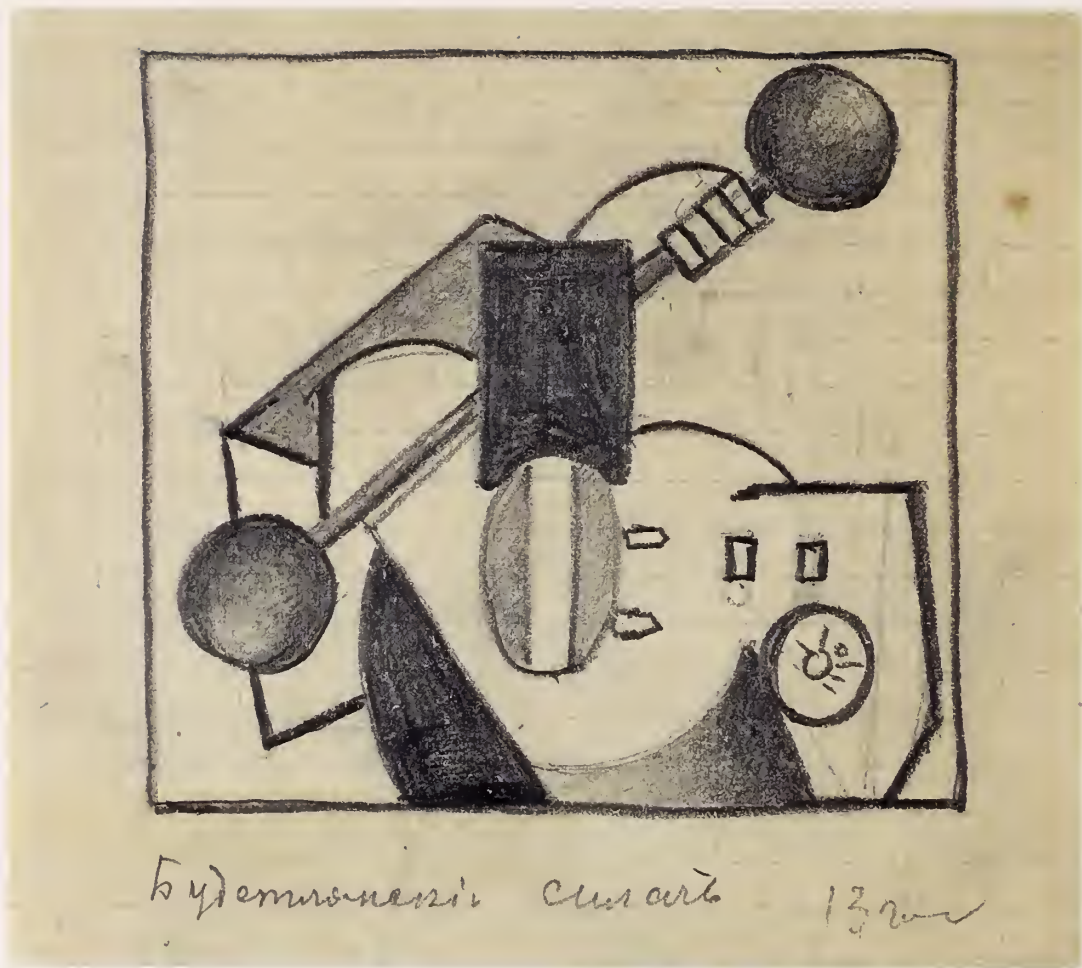
2 картина 16/11/11

Leningrad

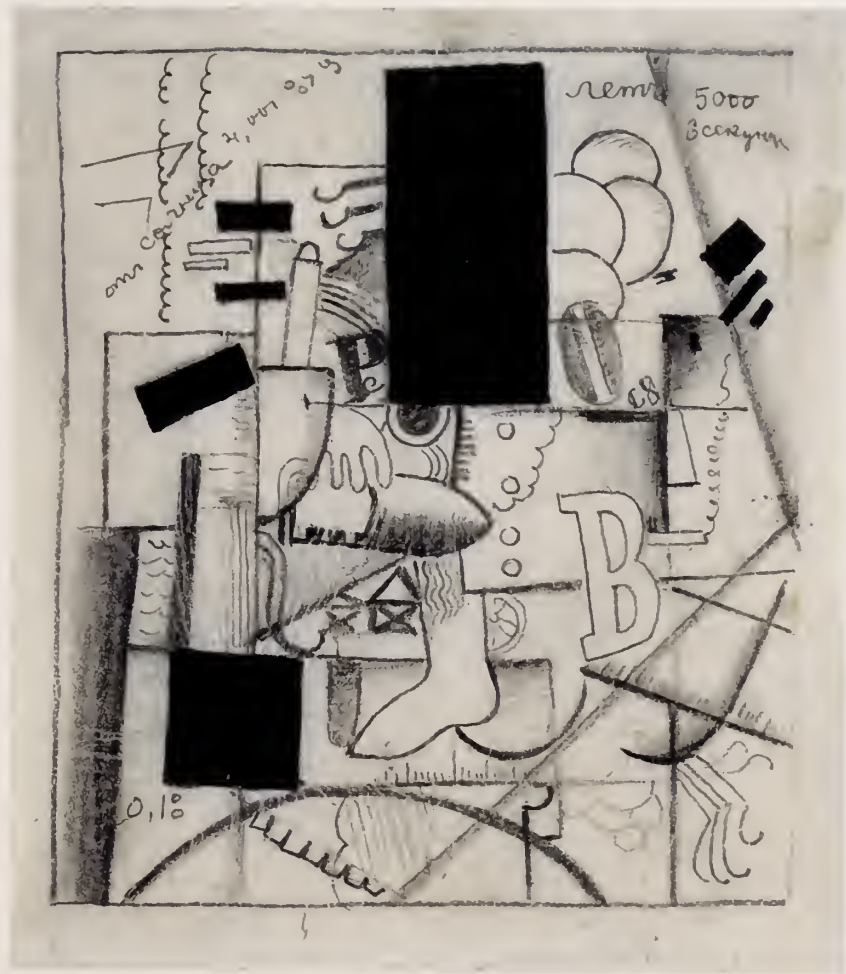
16/11/11

STUDY FOR THE DECOR OF VICTORY OVER THE SUN, ACT 1, SCENE 4
 1911, pen and ink on paper, 6 1/2 x 8 1/2 inches (16.5 x 21.5 cm)
 Foundation of the State Academic Theater of the Russian Federation
 Museum of Art, Leningrad
 Inventory No. 4.10.1.961

STUDY FOR THE DECOR OF VICTORY OVER THE SUN, ACT 2, SCENE 6
 1911, pen and ink on paper, 8 1/2 x 11 1/2 inches (21.5 x 29.2 cm)
 St. Petersburg State Museum of Theatre and Music
 Inv. No. KP.19.114



ALOGIC COMPOSITION: DESIGN FOR VICTORY OVER
THE SUN (STRONGMAN)
1913, pencil on graph paper,
4 x 4 1/2 inches (10.2 x 11.5 cm)
Foundation Cultural Center Khardzhiev-Chaga,
Amsterdam/Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam
GMB70 4 2001(122)



STUDY FOR THE DECOR OF VICTORY OVER THE SUN
1911, black ink over pencil on transparent white paper,
mounted on cardboard, 43 x 43 cm, inv. nr. 1911
Fundatie Cultureel Historisch Centrum
Amsterdam | Joods Historisch Museum, Amsterdam
RMB126.4.201116

LADY AT ADVERTISING COLUMN
1914, oil and collage on canvas,
28 x 25 ¼ inches (71 x 64 cm)
Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam
A7657

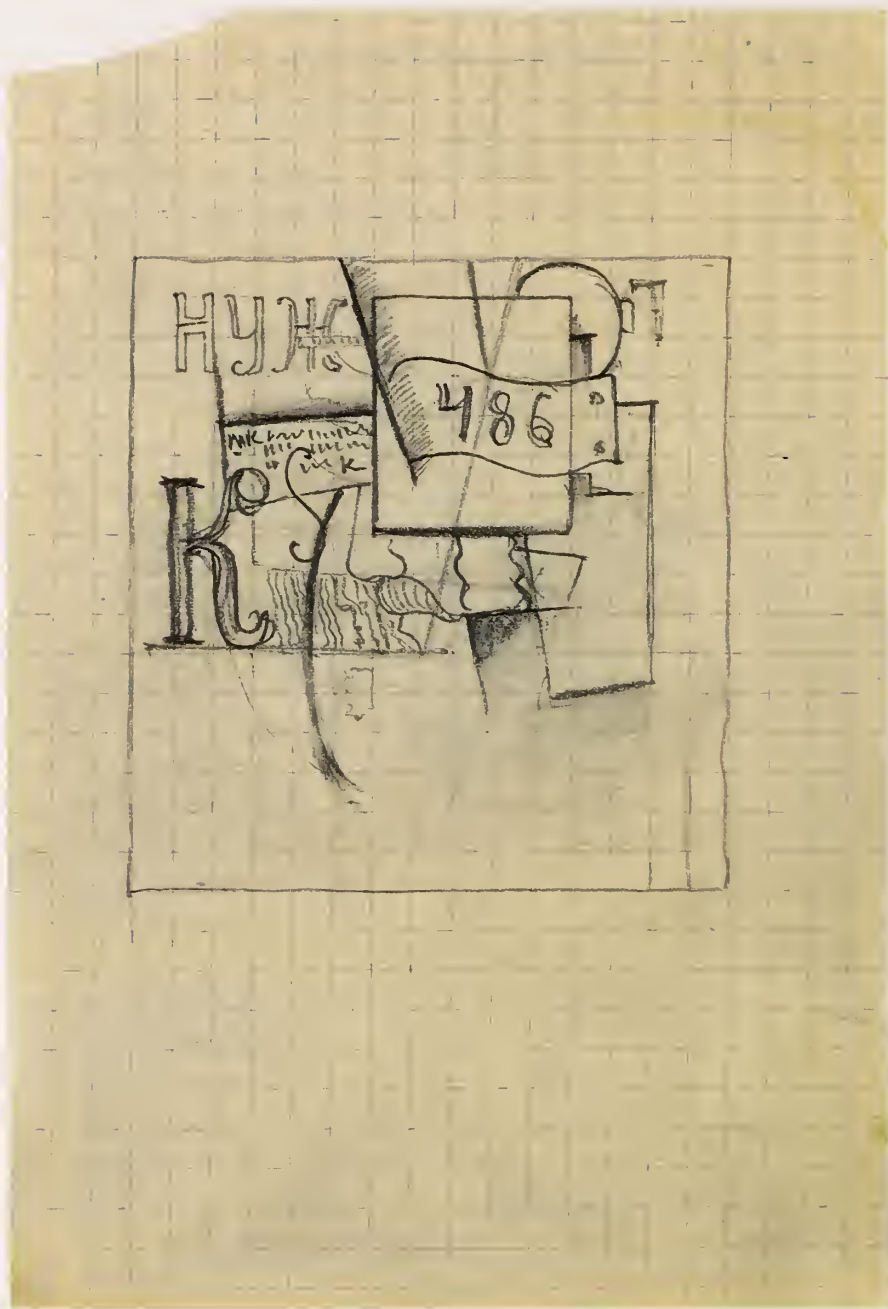




COMPOSITION WITH MONA LISA
1914, oil, collage, and pencil on canvas,
24 1/2 x 19 1/2 inches (62 x 49.5 cm)
State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg
Inv. No. Zh-440



PRIVATE OF THE FIRST DIVISION
1914, oil and collage on canvas,
21 1/4 x 17 1/4 inches (53.7 x 44.8 cm).
The Museum of Modern Art, New York. 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
B14.35



ALOGIC COMPOSITION

1914-15, pencil on graph paper,
6 1/2 x 4 1/4 inches (16.5 x 11.2 cm)

Private collection, courtesy Galerie Gmurzynska, Zug



TAILOR

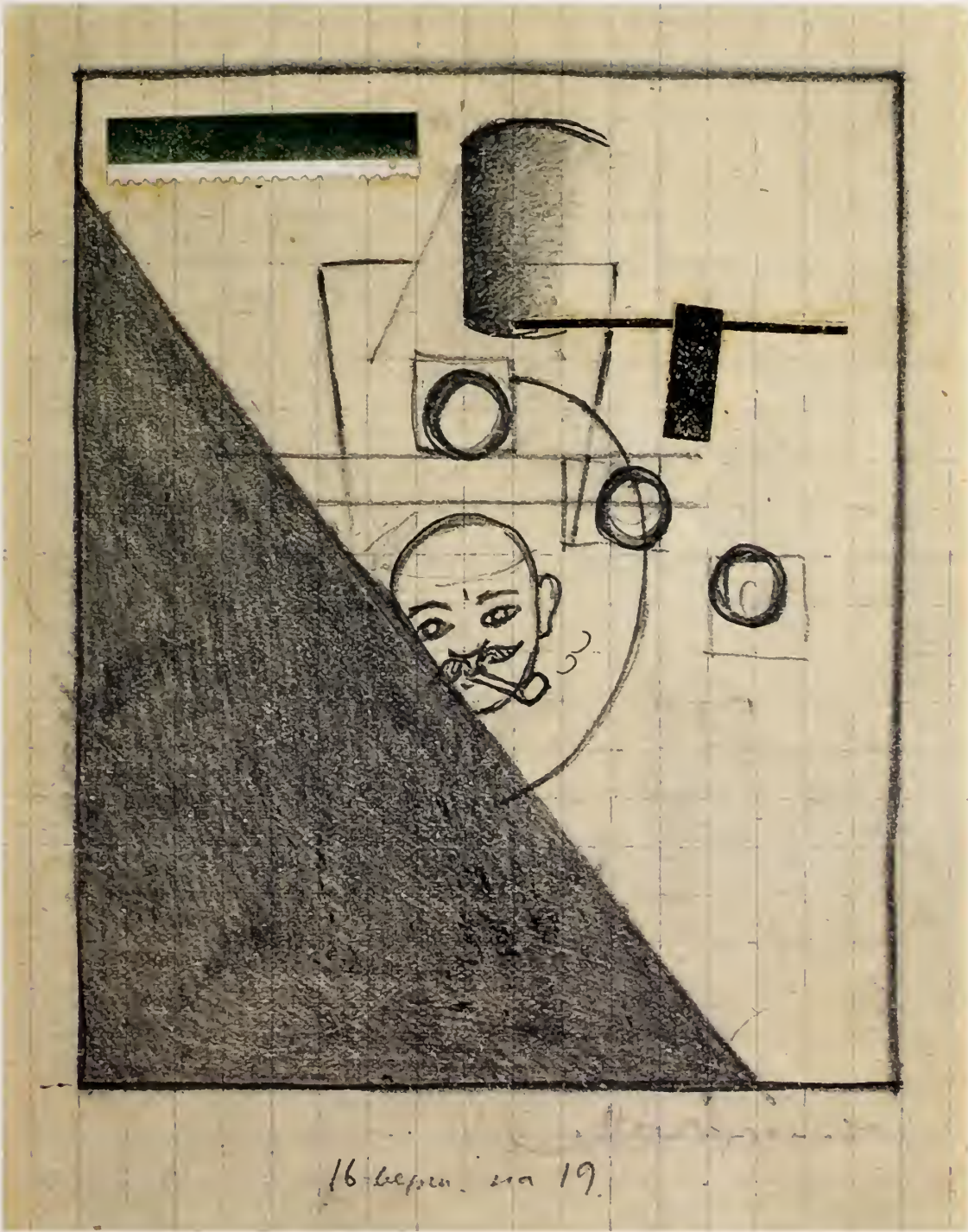
Fig. 191. pencil on graph paper

W. 4 1/2 x H. 116.2 x 11 mm

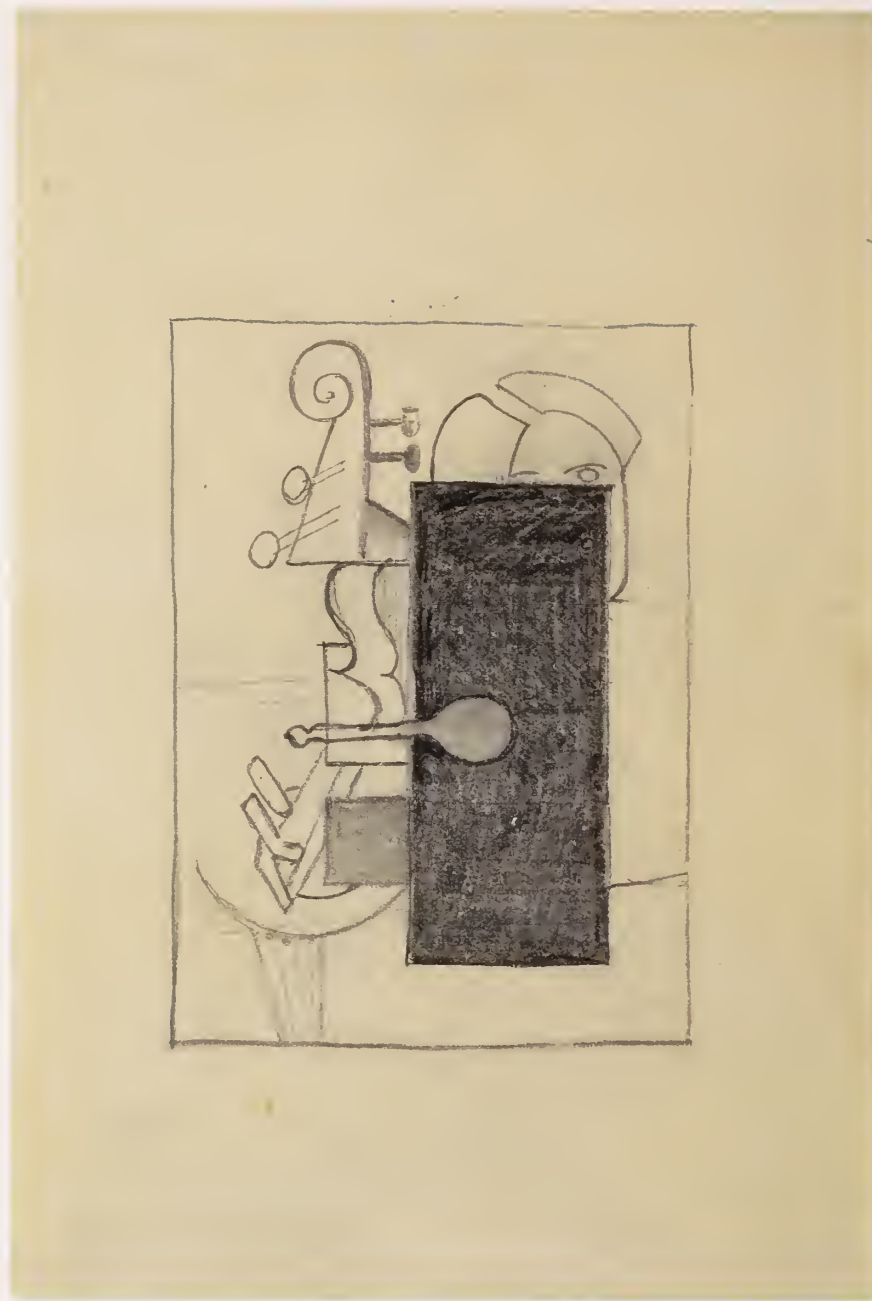
Museum Ludwig, Cologne, Germany

Dep. Slg. L. 19.9.44

CUBO-FUTURIST COMPOSITION- MAN SMOKING A PIPE
1913, pencil and collage on graph paper,
5 x 4 inches (12.8 x 10.1 cm)
Foundation Cultural Center Khardzhiev-Chaga,
Amsterdam/Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam
GMB18 4 2001 (19)



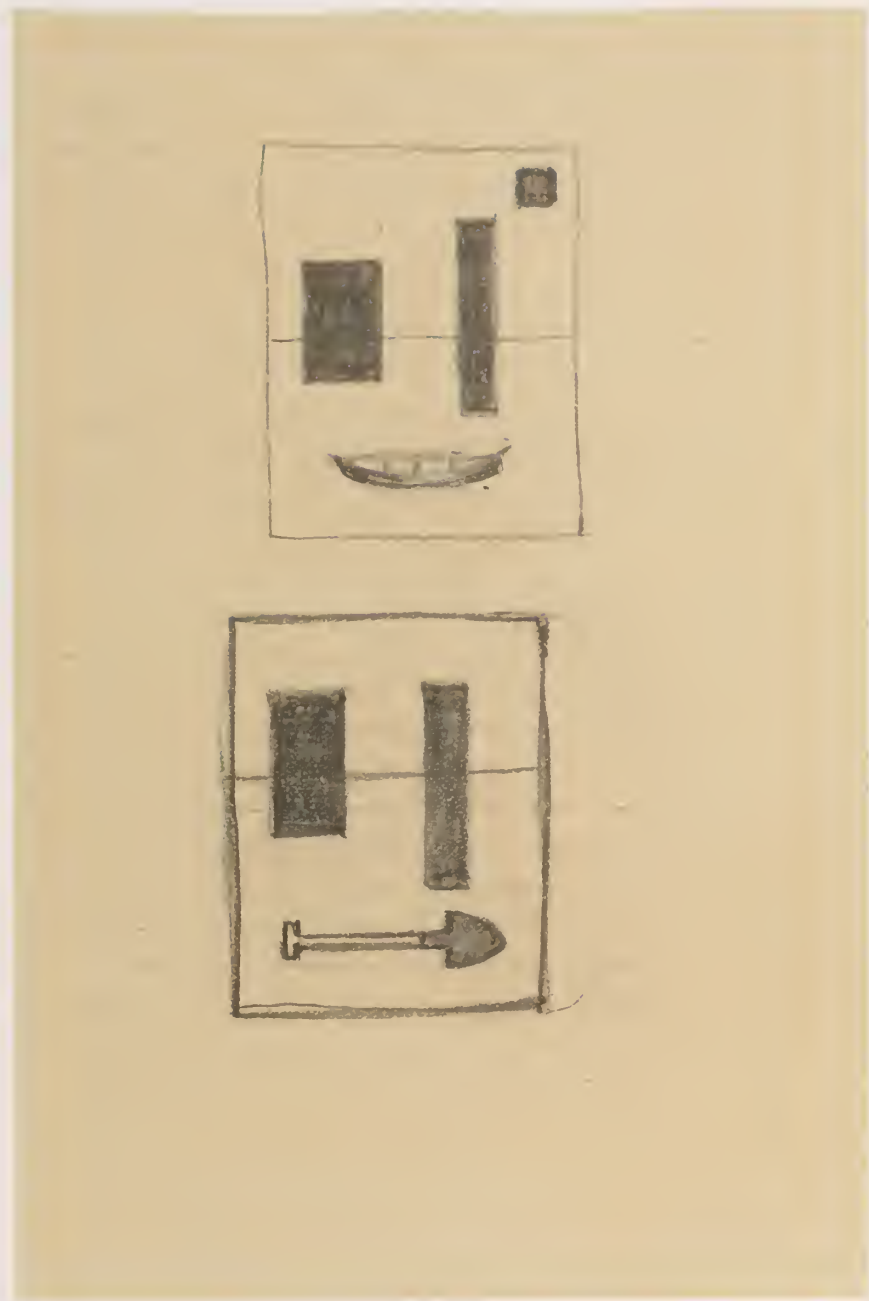
16. September 19.



ALOGIC COMPOSITION

1914-15, pencil on graph paper,
6 1/2 x 4 1/4 inches (16.4 x 11.2 cm)

Private collection, courtesy Shiraiishi Contemporary Art, Tokyo

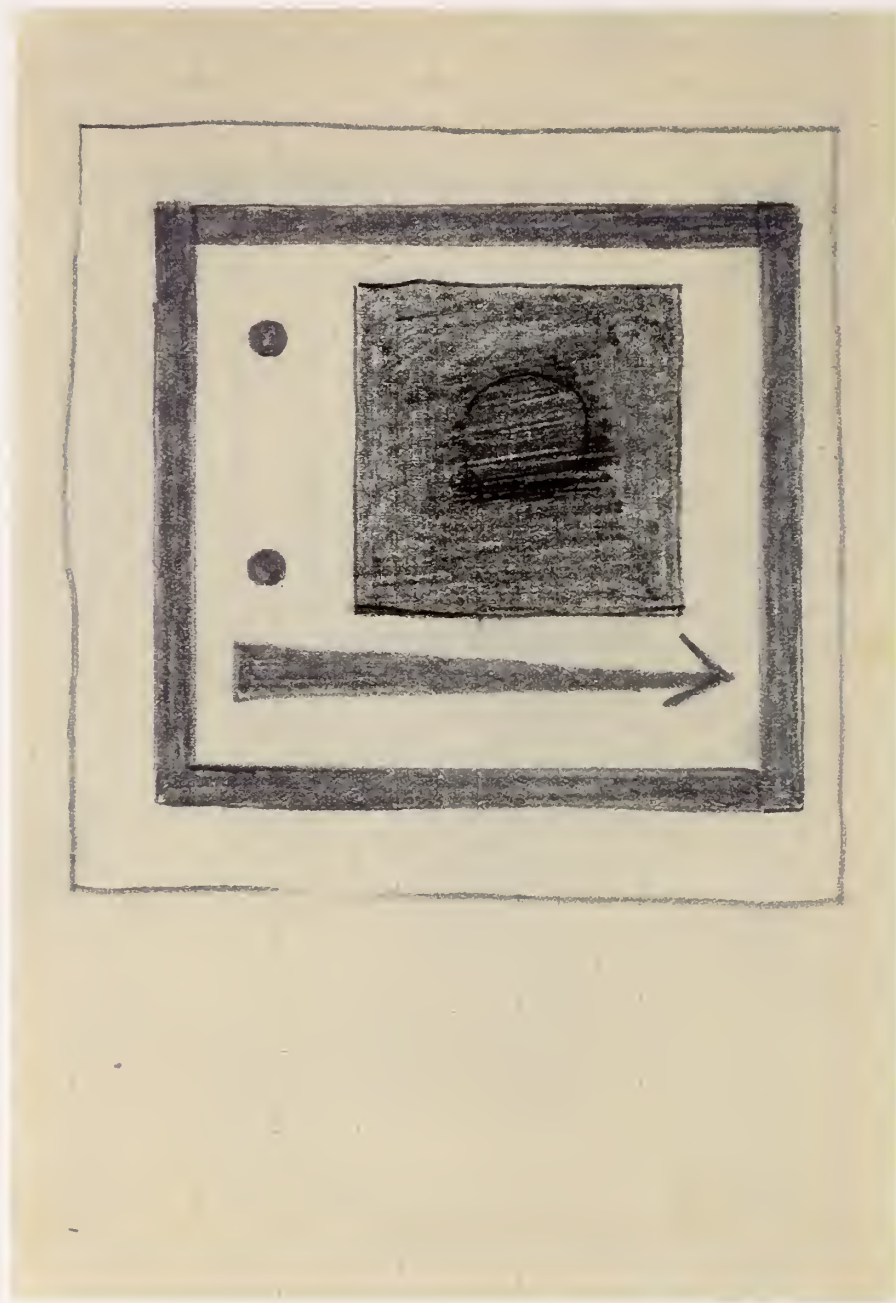


ALOGIC COMPOSITION

1915, pencil on graph paper

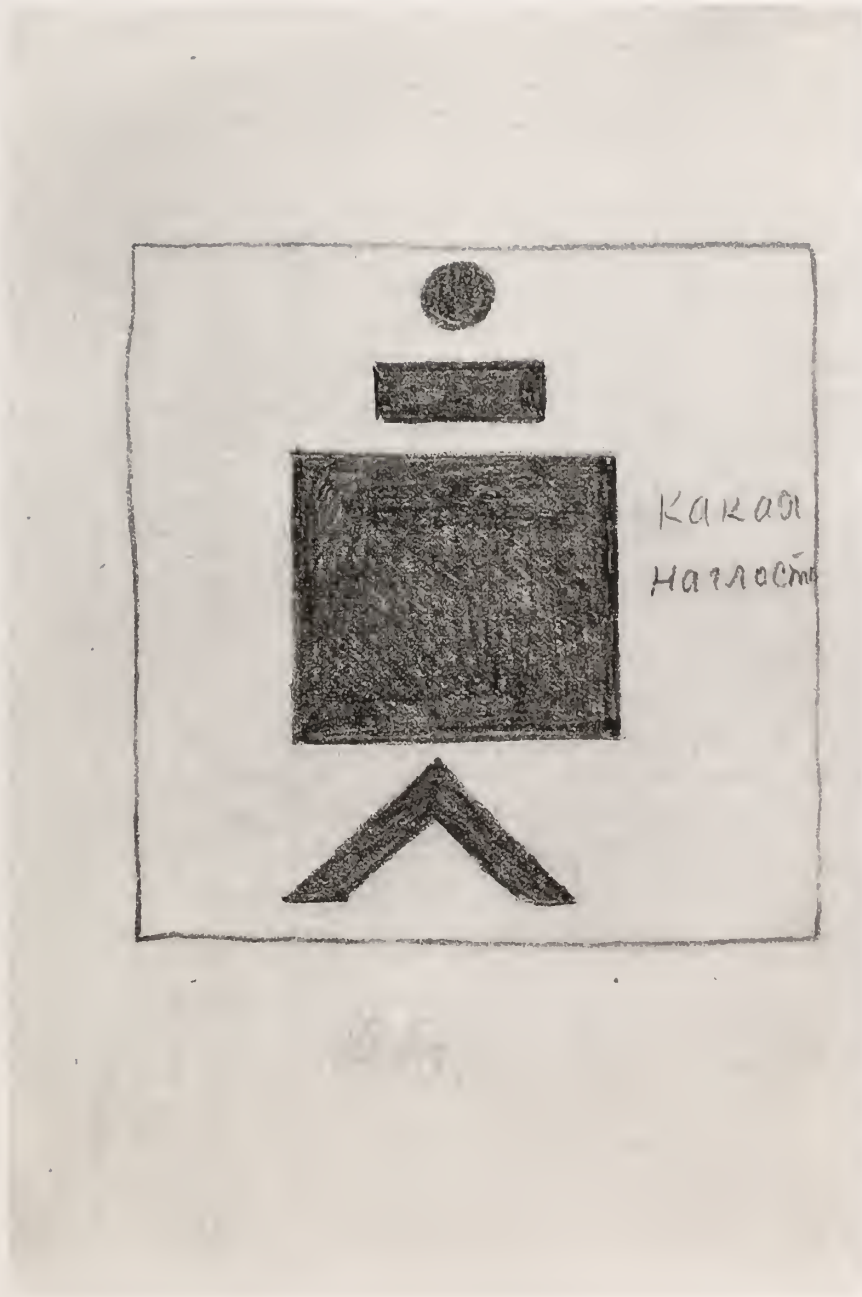
6 1/2 x 4 1/4 inches (16.5 x 11.1 cm)

Private collection, courtesy Gabele Contemporary Art



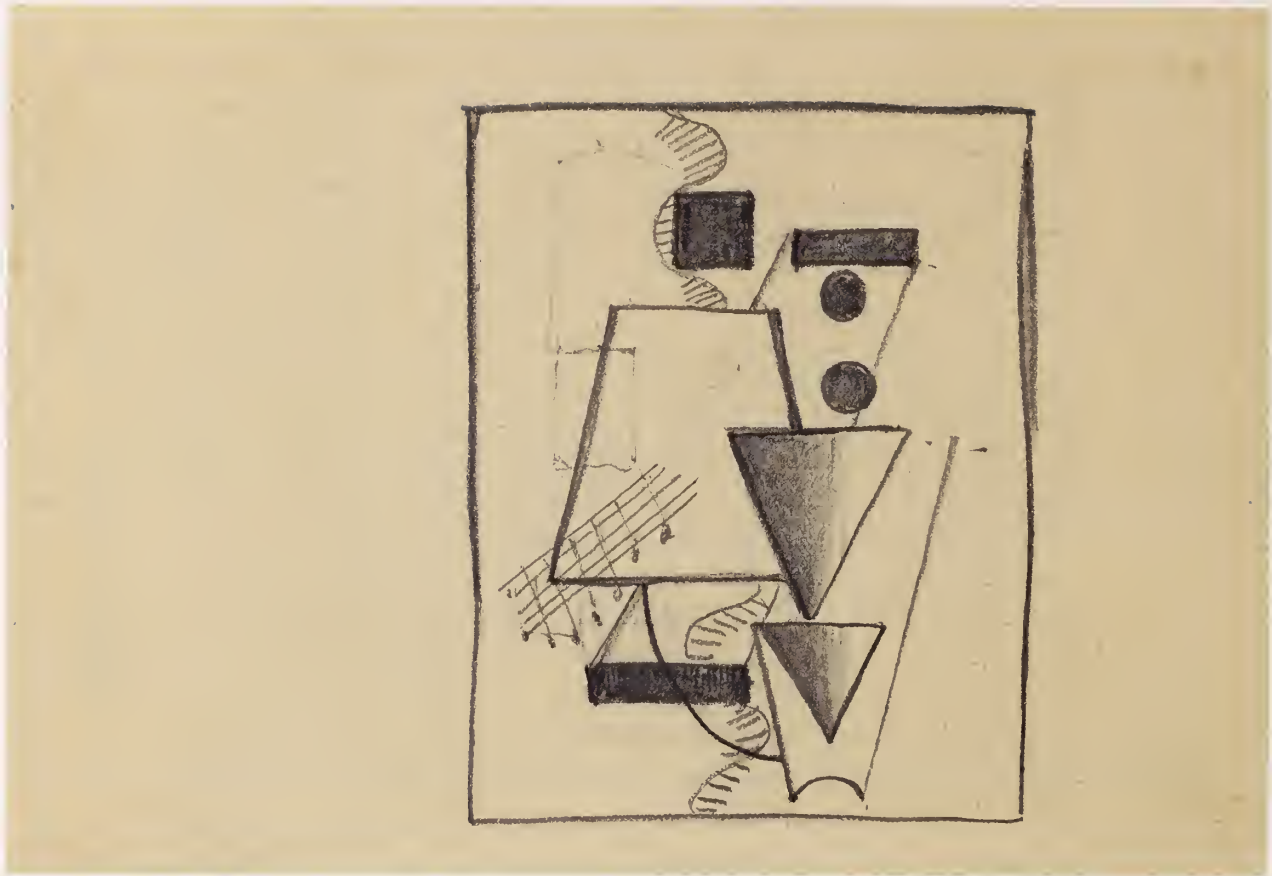
CONSTRUCTION

ca. 1915, pencil on graph paper,
6 1/4 x 4 1/4 inches (16.3 x 11.2 cm)
Museum Ludwig, Cologne, Ludwig Collection
Dep. Sig. L. 1979/45

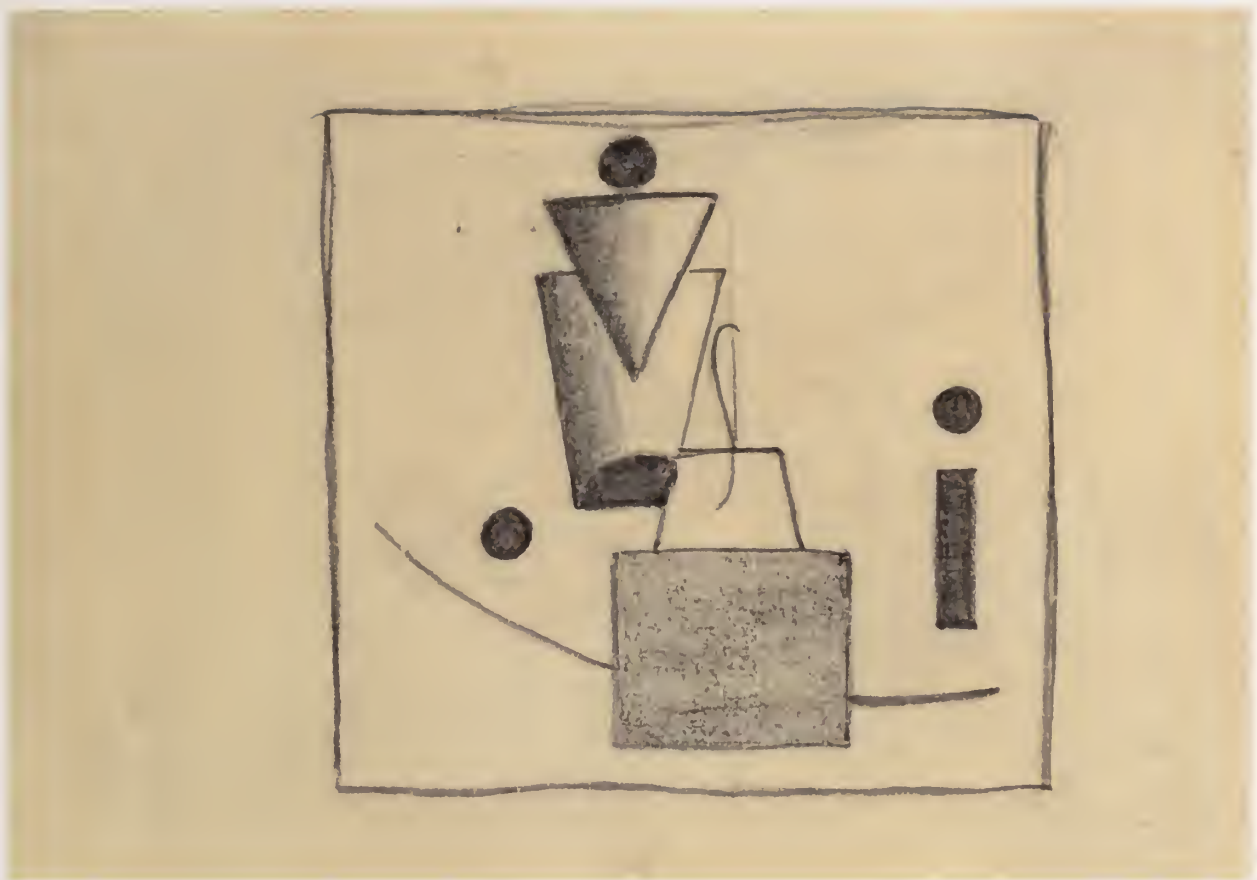


ALOGIC COMPOSITION

1967, pencil and charcoal on paper
Size: 4 1/2 x 6 1/2 inches (11.4 x 16.5 cm)
Private collection, courtesy of the artist's estate



ALOGIC COMPOSITION
1915, pencil on graph paper,
4 3/4 x 6 1/2 inches (11.2 x 16.5 cm)
Hiroshima Prefectural Art Museum, Japan
D 323



ALOGIC COMPOSITION 4A

1941 - pencil on graph paper

4 1/2 x 6 1/2 inches (11.2 x 16.5 cm)

Private collection, Los Angeles, California, USA

BLACK SQUARE

1915, oil on canvas.
31 ¼ × 31 ¼ inches (79,5 × 79,5 cm)
State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow
Inv. No. 11925





PLANE IN ROTATION, CALLED BLACK CIRCLE
1915, oil on canvas, 31 1/2 x 31 1/2 inches (79 x 79 cm)
Private collection, courtesy Galerie Gmurzynska, Zug



BLACK CROSS

1915 oil on canvas

31 1/2 x 31 1/2 inches (80 x 80 cm)

Musée national d'art moderne

Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris

Inv. AM 1980-1

ELONGATED PLANE

1915, oil on canvas, 31 1/2 x 31 1/2 inches (80 x 80 cm)
Private collection, courtesy Galerie Gmurzynska, Zug

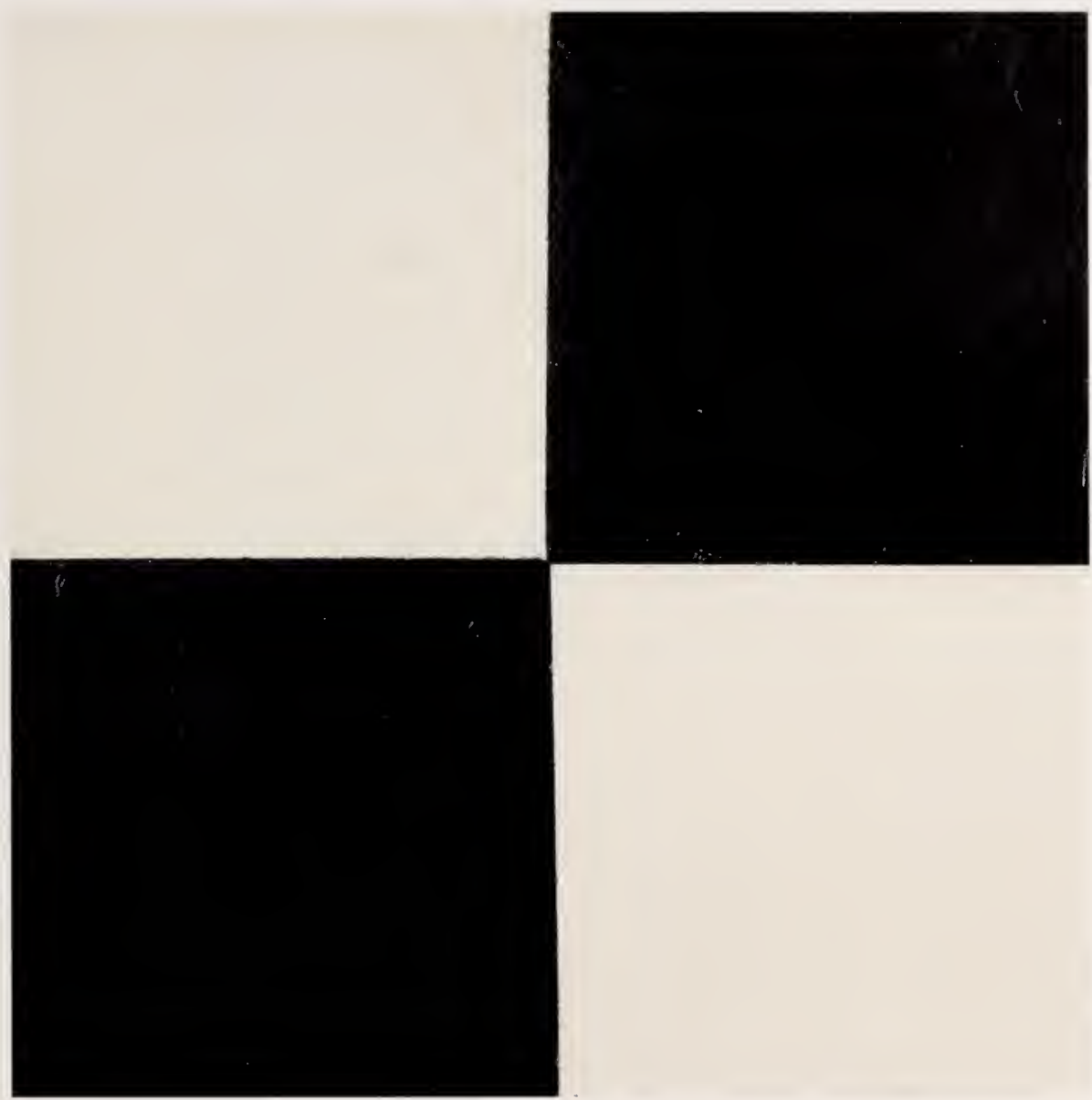


FOUR SQUARES

1915, oil on canvas, 19 1/4 x 19 1/4 inches (49 x 49 cm)

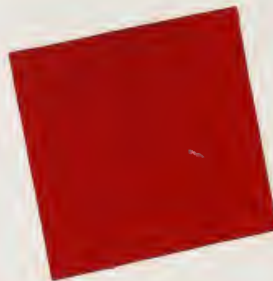
A. N. Radischev State Art Museum, Saratov

Inv. No. Zh-1089



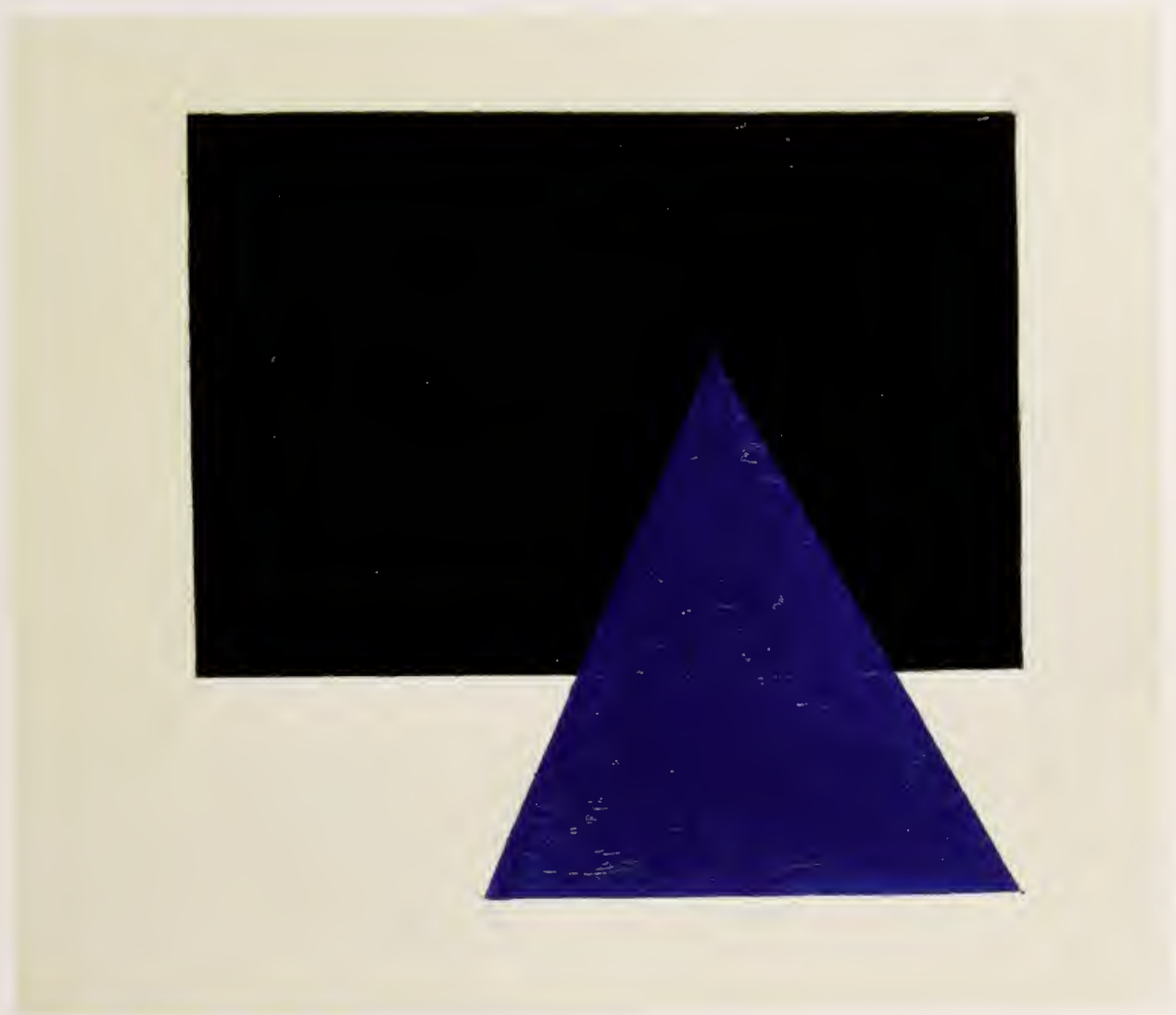
PICTORIAL REALISM OF A PEASANT WOMAN IN TWO
DIMENSIONS, CALLED RED SQUARE
1915, oil on canvas, 15 x 11 ¼ inches (40 x 30 cm)
Private collection - courtesy Galerie Gmurzynska, Zug





**PAINTERLY REALISM. BOY WITH KNAPSACK—COLOR MASSES
IN THE FOURTH DIMENSION**

1915, oil on canvas, 28 × 17½ inches (71.1 × 44.5 cm)
The Museum of Modern Art, New York. 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)
B16.35



SUPREMATIST PAINTING BLACK RECTANGLE
BLUE TRIANGLE
1913, 100 cm x 100 cm
Oil on canvas, 1913, 100 cm x 100 cm
Tate Modern, London, UK
© 2013 Tate, London, UK
www.tate.org.uk

SUPREMATIST COMPOSITION WITH PLANE IN PROJECTION

1915, oil on canvas, 22 1/2 x 22 1/2 inches (57 x 57 cm)

Private collection, courtesy Galerie Gmurzynska, Zug



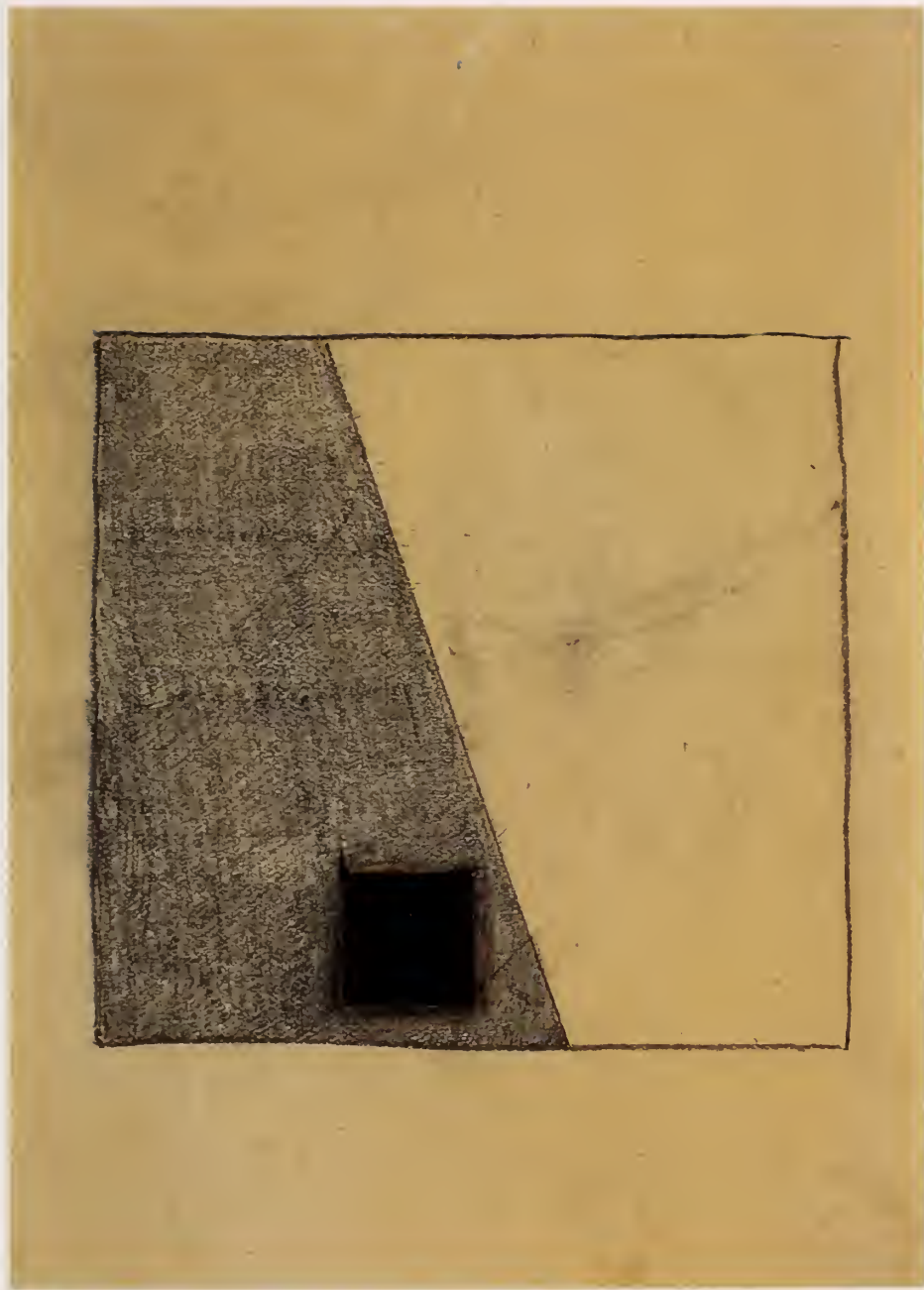
SUPREMATISM. SQUARE ON A DIAGONAL SURFACE

1915, pencil and india ink on graph paper.

6 1/4 x 4 1/4 inches (15.4 x 11 cm)

Foundation Cultural Center Khardzhiev-Chaga,
Amsterdam/Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam

GMB91 4 2001(20)



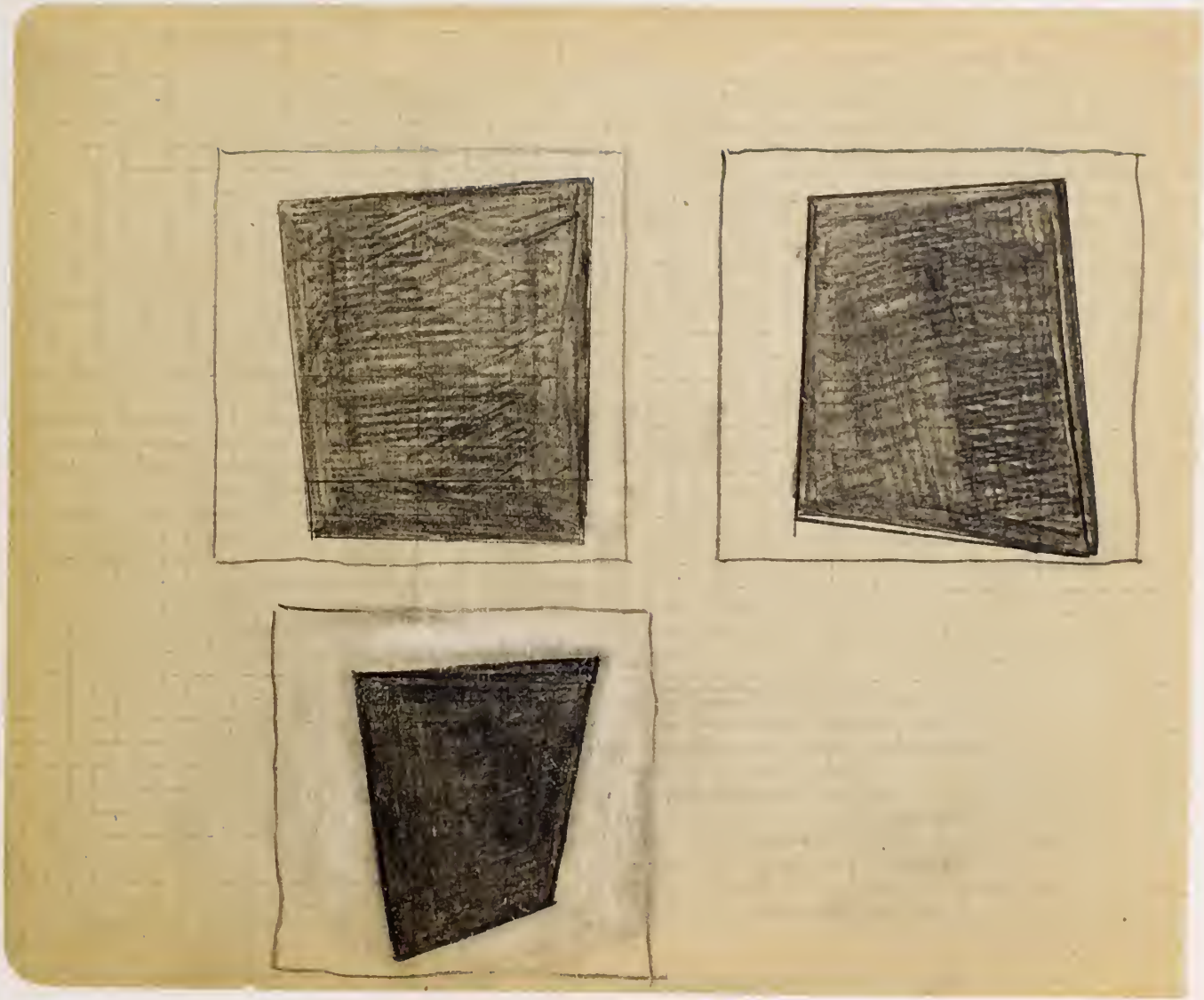


SUPREMATISM. FOUR SPATIAL ELEMENTS AGAINST A BLACK TRAPEZOID

1915, pencil on graph paper, 4 3/4 x 4 3/4 inches (11.9 x 11.1 cm)

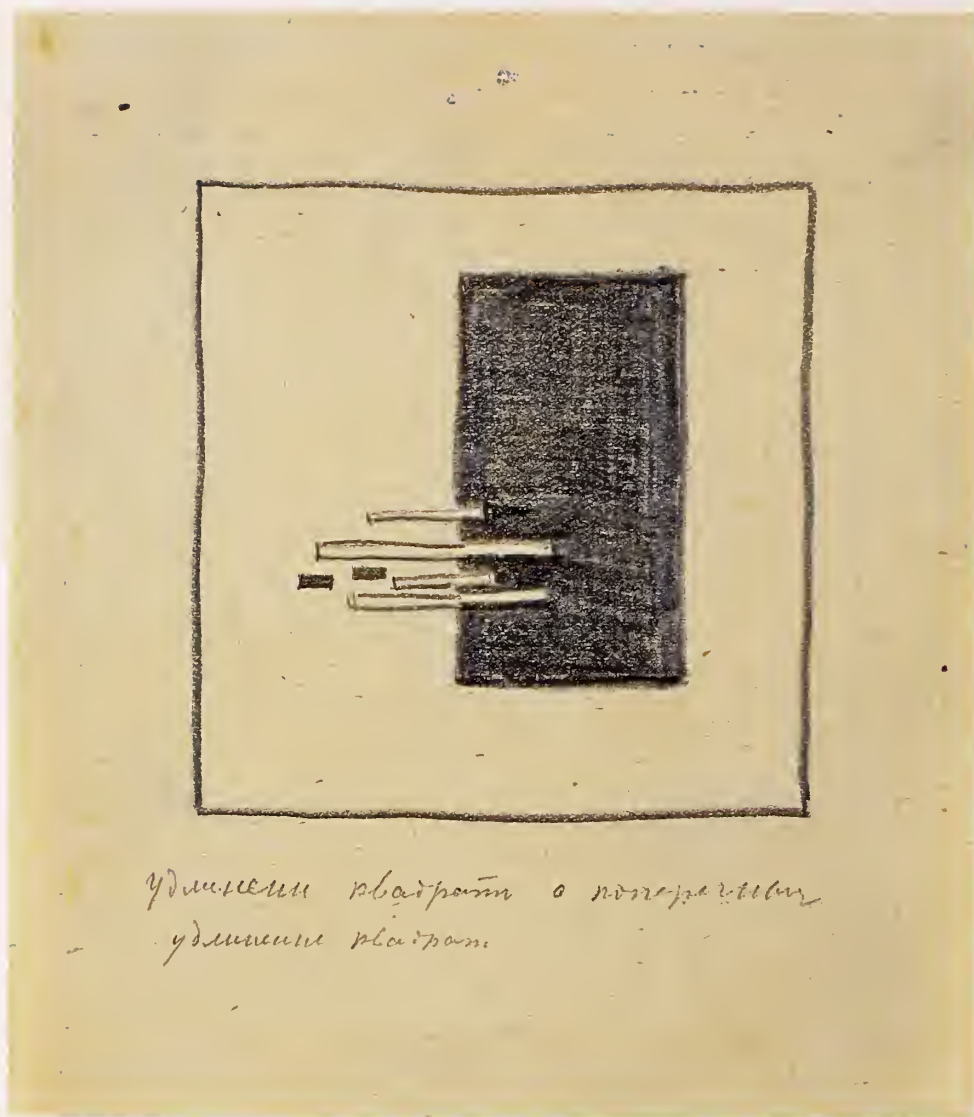
Foundation Cultural Center Khardzhiev-Chaga, Amsterdam/Stedelijk
Museum, Amsterdam

GMBB2 4 2001(32)



THREE IRREGULAR QUADRANGLES

Left: pencil and wash
Middle: red ink and wash
Right: black ink and wash
All: 1/2" x 1/2" x 1/2" x 1/2"
(MATH 3 Q1 1911)



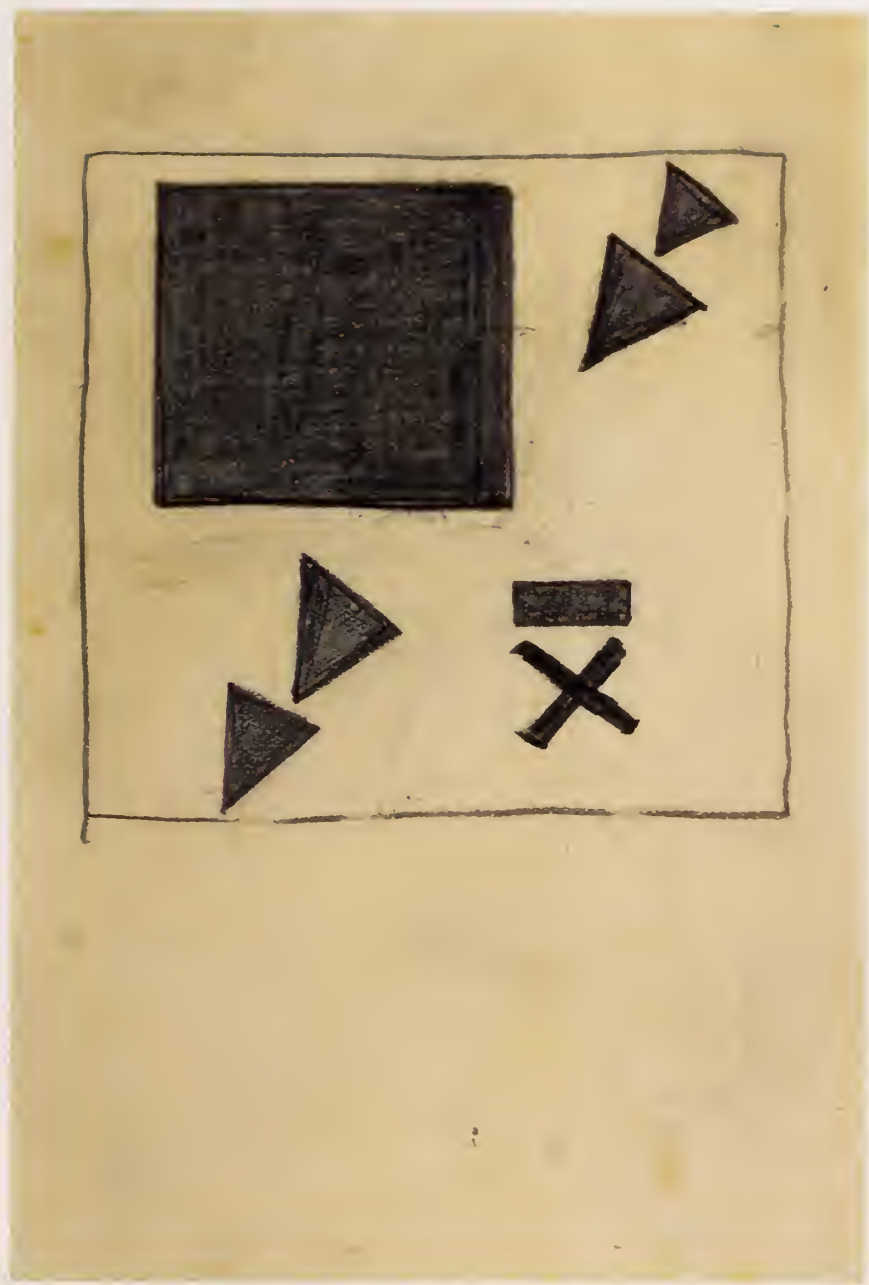
ELONGATED SQUARE WITH CROSSING ELEMENTS

1915, pencil on graph paper,

4 7/8 x 4 3/4 inches (12.5 x 11.6 cm)

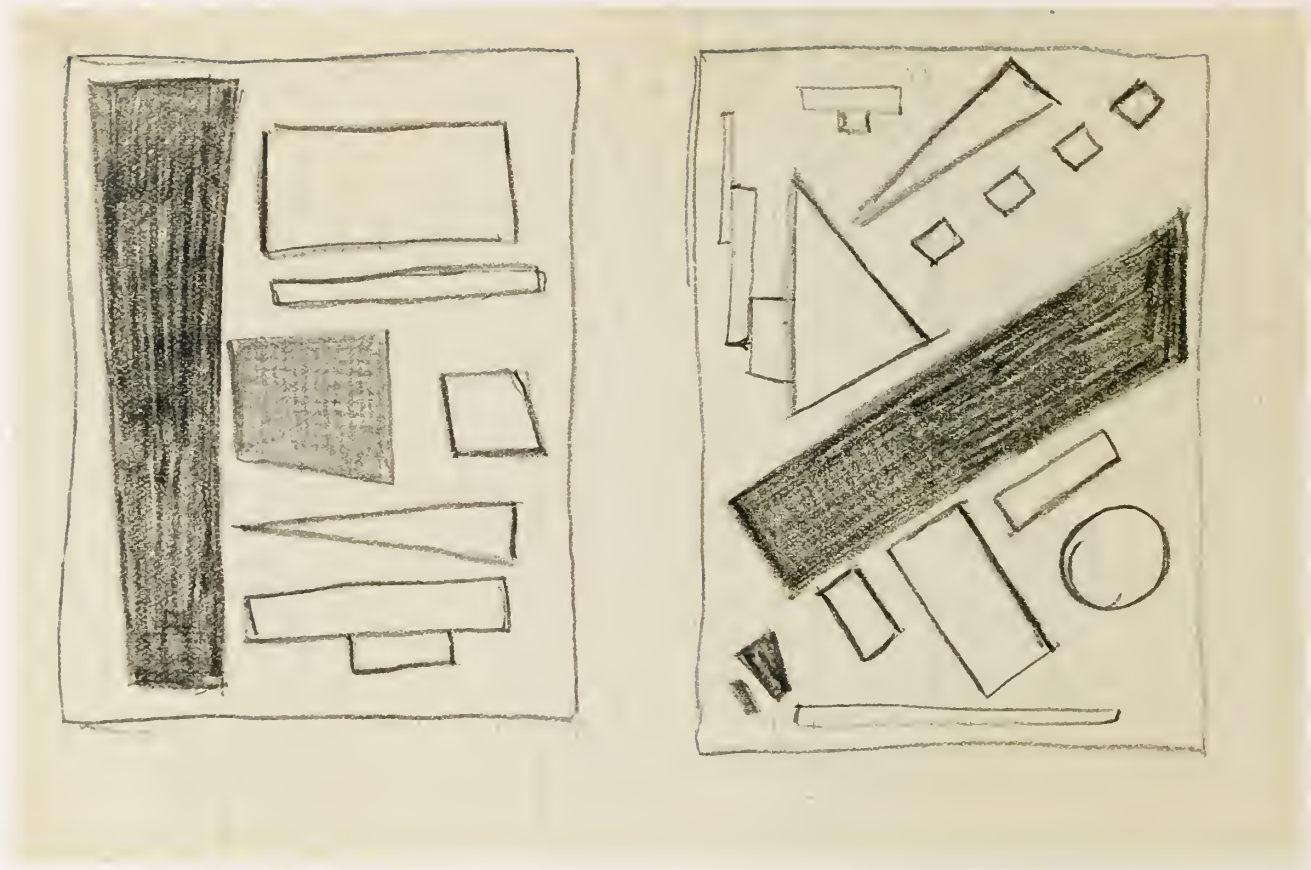
Foundation Cultural Center Khardzhiev-Chaga,
Amsterdam/Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam

GMA31.4.2001(123)

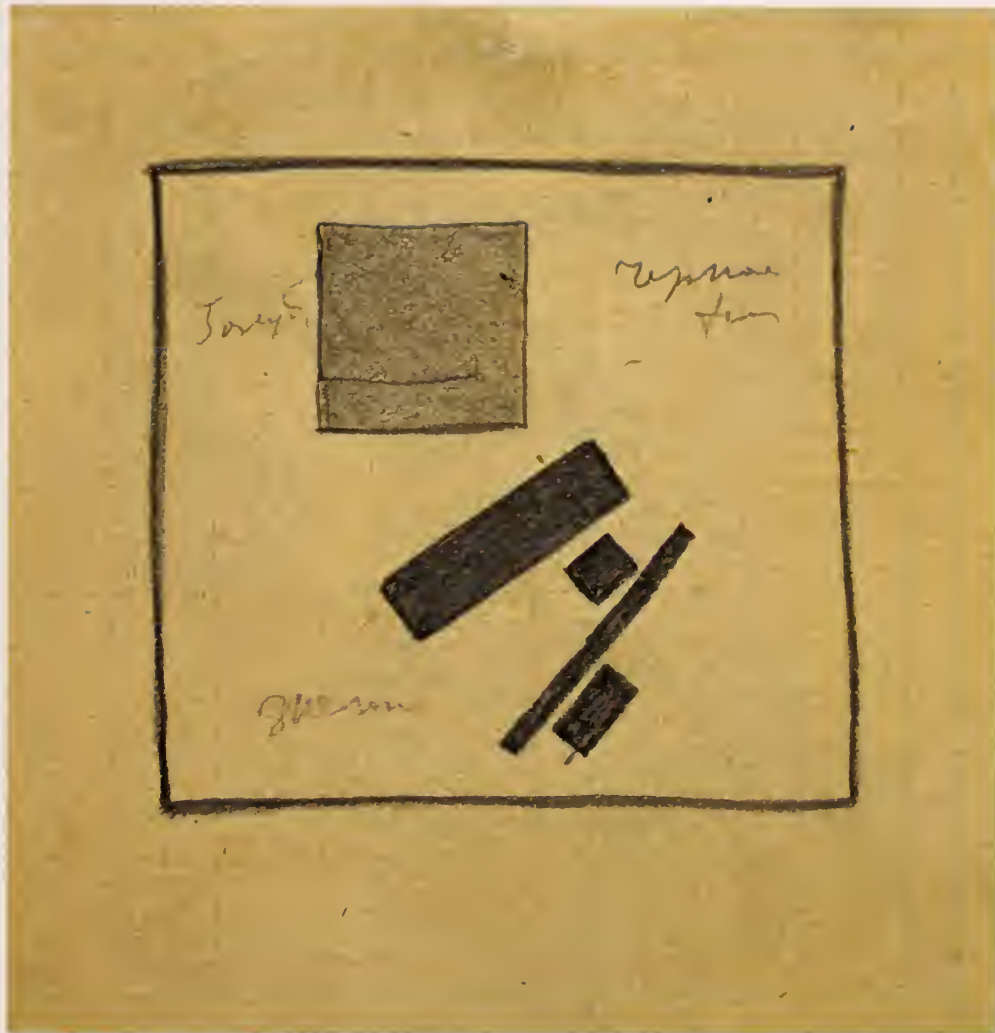


SUPREMATISM

91^o per il paesaggio
c. 1940 - h. 116 x l. 118 cm
Museum Ludwig, Cologne, Germany
Dep. Sig. L. 19/9/24



COMPOSITION 17 R
1915, pencil on graph paper,
4 3/8 x 6 1/2 inches (11.1 x 16.7 cm)
Private collection, courtesy Galerie Gmurzynska, Zug



COMPOSITION 21 C
1911, pencil on graph paper
18 x 18 cm (7 1/8 x 7 1/8 in.)
Private collection, Toronto, Ontario, Canada

SUPREMATISM (18TH CONSTRUCTION)

1915, oil on canvas, 20 3/4 x 20 3/4 inches (53 x 53 cm)

Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam

A7674



SUPREMATIST PAINTING: EIGHT RED RECTANGLES
1915, oil on canvas, 22 1/4 x 19 1/4 inches (57.5 x 48.5 cm)
Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam
A7672





SUPREMATISM
1915, oil on canvas.
21 1/4 x 21 1/4 inches (53.5 x 53.7 cm)
Regional Art Museum, Ivanovo
Inv. No. ZhS-786



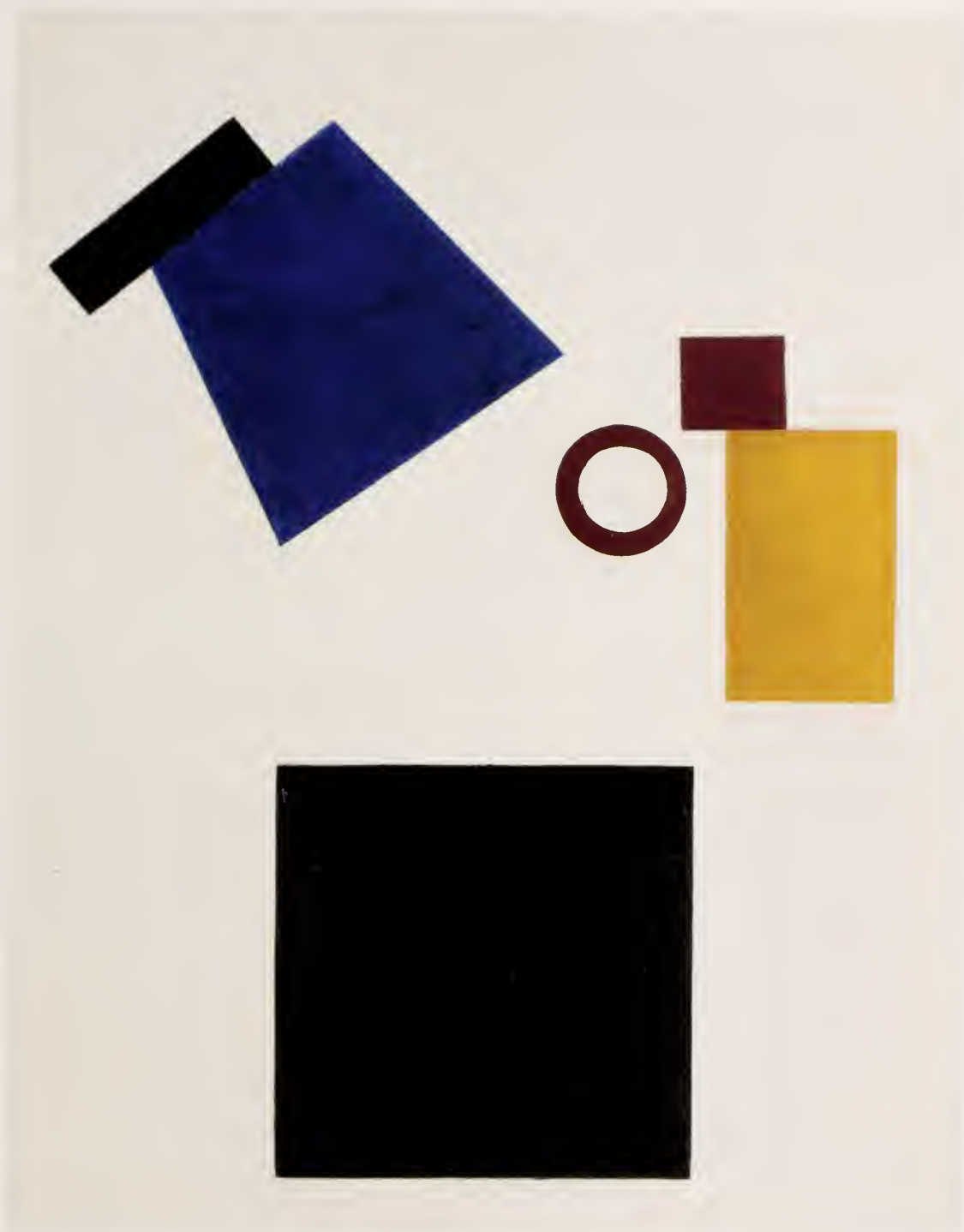
SUPREMATIST COMPOSITION: AIRPLANE FLYING

1915, oil on canvas, 22 7/8 x 19 inches (58.1 x 48.3 cm)

The Museum of Modern Art, New York. 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 248.35

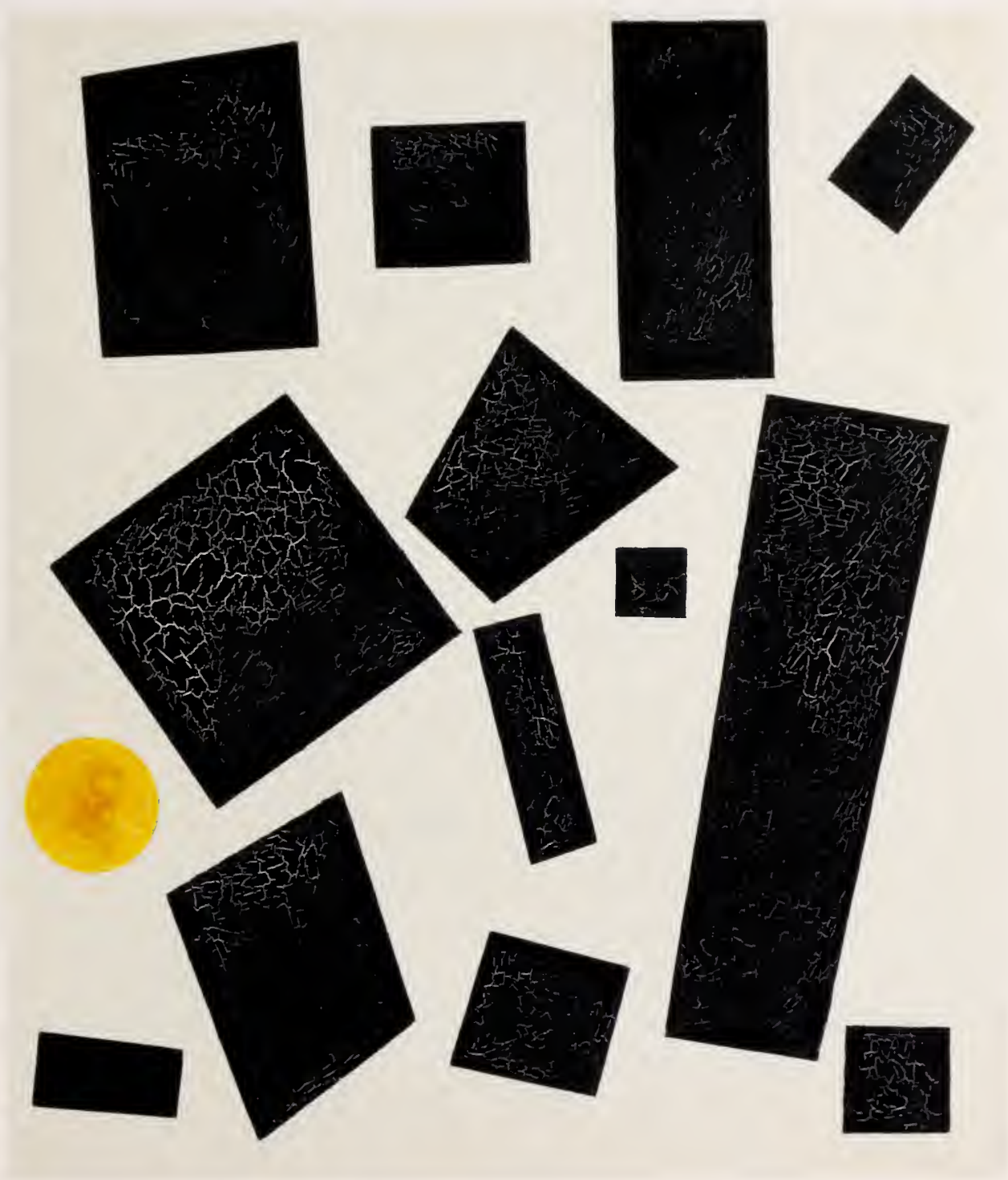


SUPREMATISM: PAINTERLY REALISM OF A FOOTBALL PLAYER
(COLOR MASSES IN THE FOURTH DIMENSION)
1915, oil on canvas, 27 1/2 x 17 3/4 inches (70 x 44 cm)
Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam
A7682



SUPREMATISM (SELF-PORTRAIT IN TWO DIMENSIONS)
1917, oil on canvas, 100 x 14 1/2 inches (254 x 62 cm),
Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam
A7683

SUPREMATIST COMPOSITION
1915, oil on canvas, 27³/₁₆ × 23³/₁₆ inches (70 × 60 cm)
Museum Ludwig, Cologne, Ludwig Collection
ML 1620





SUPREMATISM
1915, oil on canvas, 14 1/2 x 14 inches (44.5 x 35.5 cm)
Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam
A7675



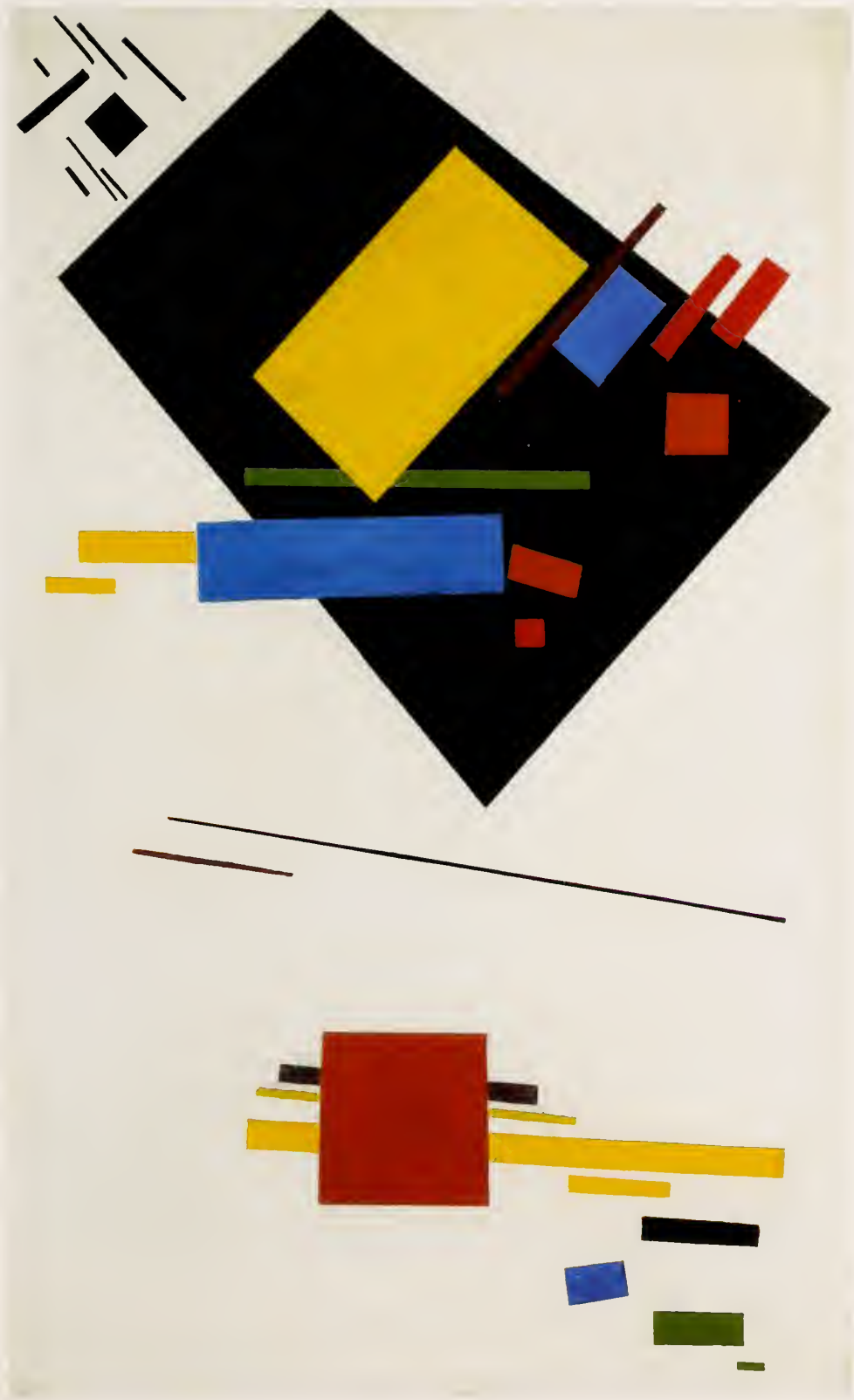
SUPREMATISM (SUPREMUS NO. 50)
1917, gouache on paper, 38 1/4 x 26 1/2 inches (97 x 66 cm)
Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam
A7663

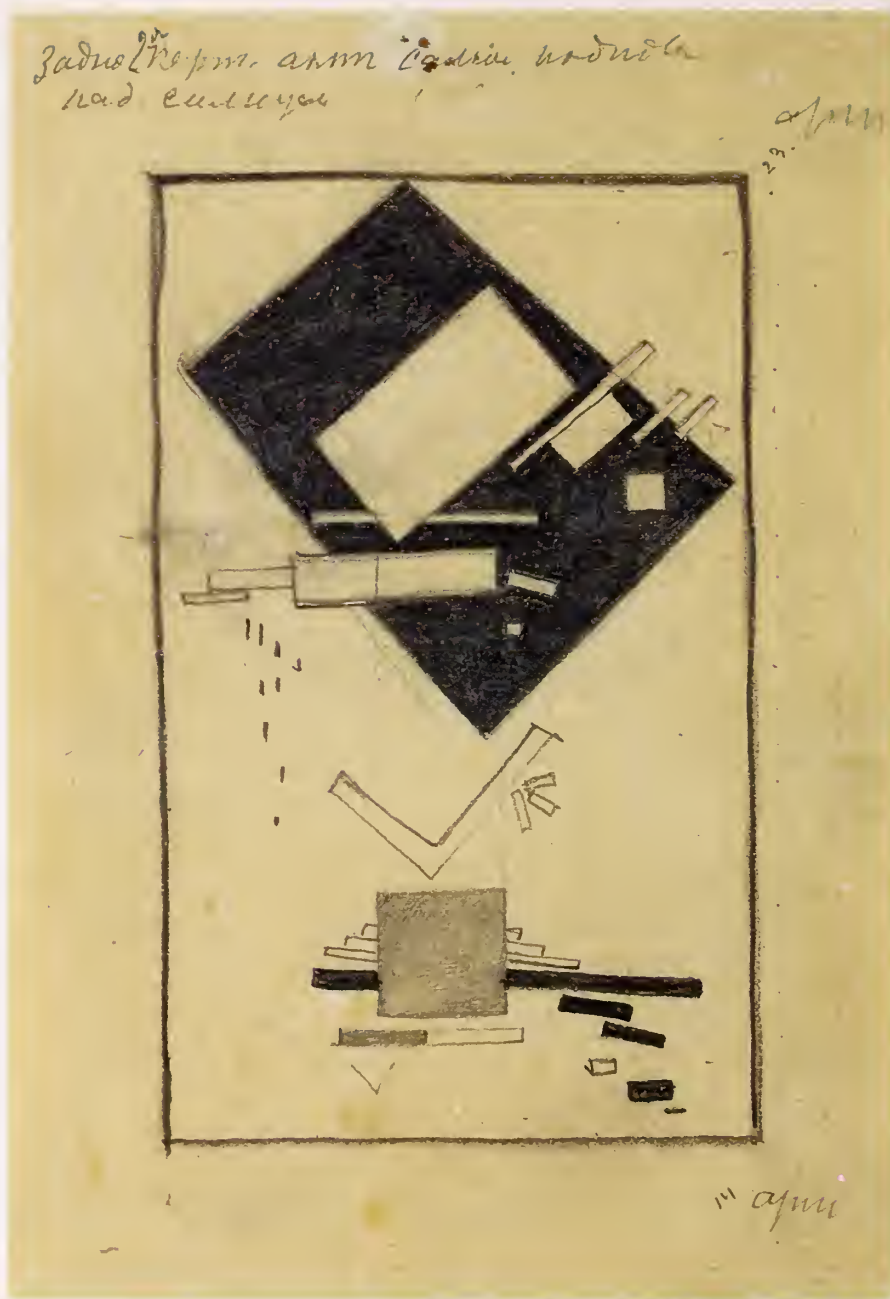
SUPREMATIST PAINTING

1915, oil on canvas, 40 × 24 3/4 inches (101.5 × 62 cm)

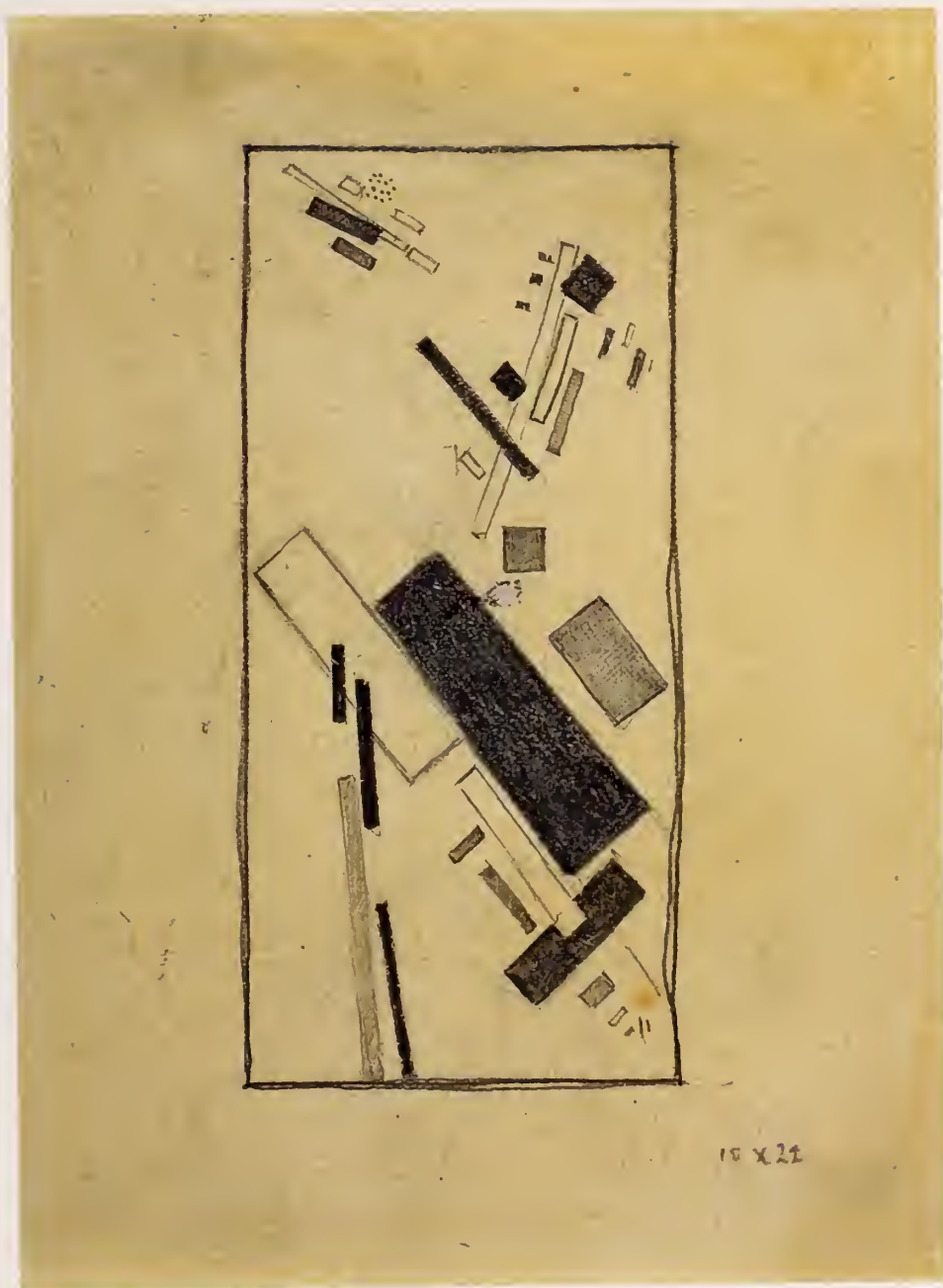
Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam

A7681



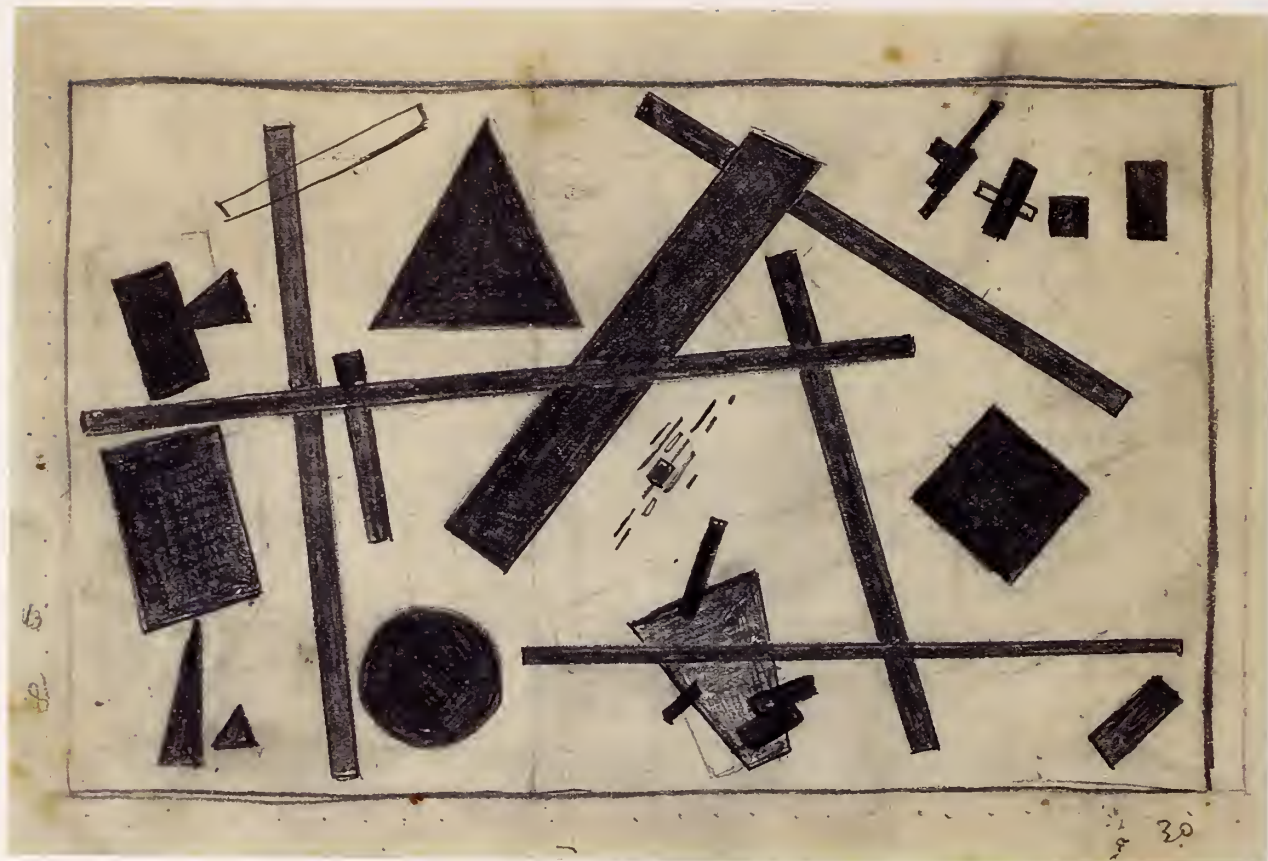


**SUPREMATISM. LARGE BLACK TRAPEZIUM AND
RED SQUARE AMONG RECTANGLES AND LINES**
1915, pencil on graph paper, 6 1/4 x 4 1/4 inches (15.7 x 10.8 cm)
Foundation Cultural Center Khardzhiev-Chaga,
Amsterdam/Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam
GMB69.4.2001(34)



19 x 21

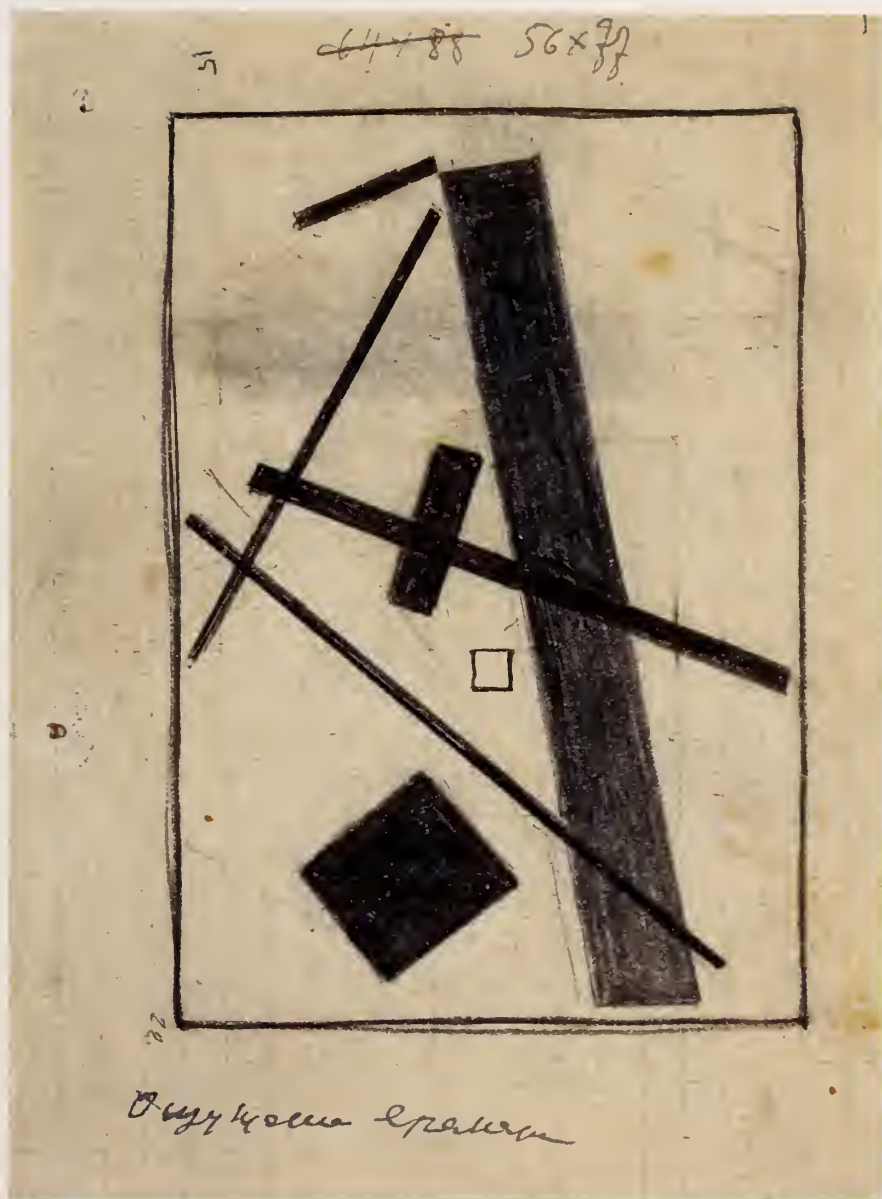
DRAWING RELATED TO HOUSE UNDER CONSTRUCTION
1911 pencil on paper, 6 1/2 x 4 1/2 inches (16.5 x 11.4 cm)
Ferdinand de Soto, Center for Constructive Change
Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam
(MA 1914.2007.180)



SUPREMATISM: CIRCLE AMONG RECTANGLES
AND TRIANGLES

1915, pencil over traces of erased sketch on graph paper,
4 1/8 x 6 1/2 inches (11.2 x 16.6 cm)

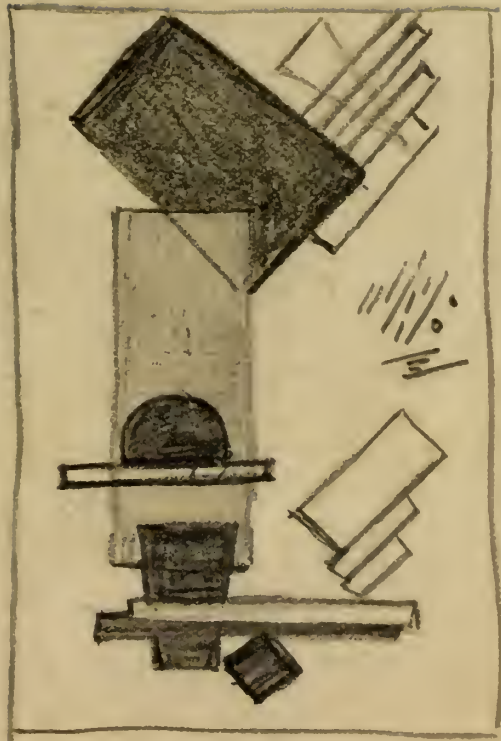
Foundation Cultural Center Khardzhiev-Chaga,
Amsterdam/Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam
GM888 4 2001(35)



SUPREMATISM SENSATION OF TIME

1911, pen and ink on graph paper
size: 4 1/2 in. high, 14 1/2 in. wide
Fundation of the State of the Netherlands
Amsterdam, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam
GMB19.4.20.11.11

COMPOSITION 12 R
1915, pencil on graph paper,
4 1/8 x 4 3/4 inches (16.3 x 11.2 cm)
Private collection, courtesy Galerie Gmurz, Vienna, Aug





SUPREMATISM NONOBJECTIVE COMPOSITION
1915, oil on canvas, 31 1/2 x 31 1/2 inches (80 x 80 cm)
Museum of Fine Arts, Ekaterinburg
Inv. No. ZhR-397



SUPREMATISM
1915. White canvas. 114 x 114 cm (45 x 45 in.)
State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg
Inv. No. ZHB-1408

SUPREMATISM

1915, oil on canvas, 34 1/2 x 28 3/4 inches (87.5 x 72.7 cm)

State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg

Inv. No. Zh8-1332





SUPREMATISM (SUPREMUS NO. 55)
1916, oil on canvas, 31 1/2 x 31 1/2 inches (80 x 80 cm)
Regional Art Museum F.A. Kovalenko, Krasnodar
Inv. No. Zh-358



SUPREMATISM (SUPREMUS NO. 56)

1916 (after an original 1914, 28 cm x 28 cm, 8 5/8 x 11 1/8")

State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg

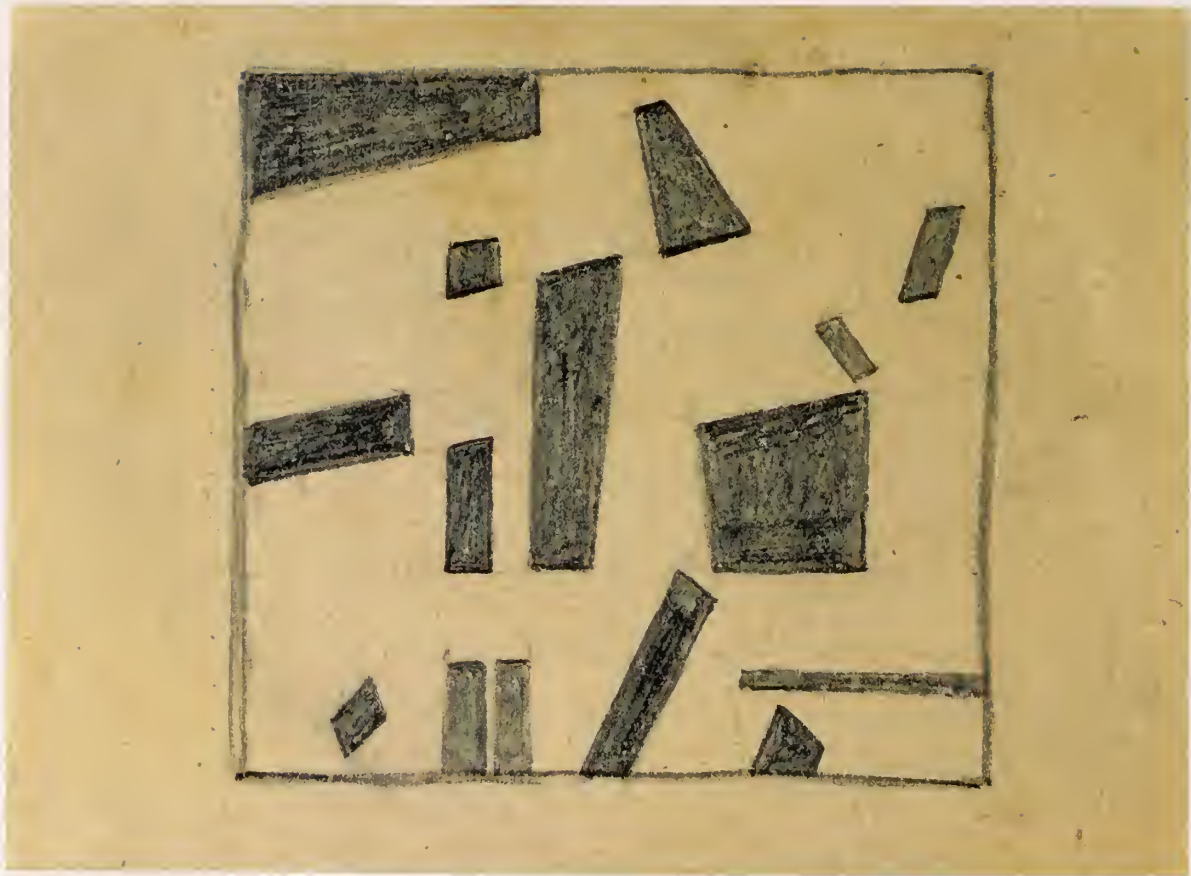
Inv. No. ZhB 1421



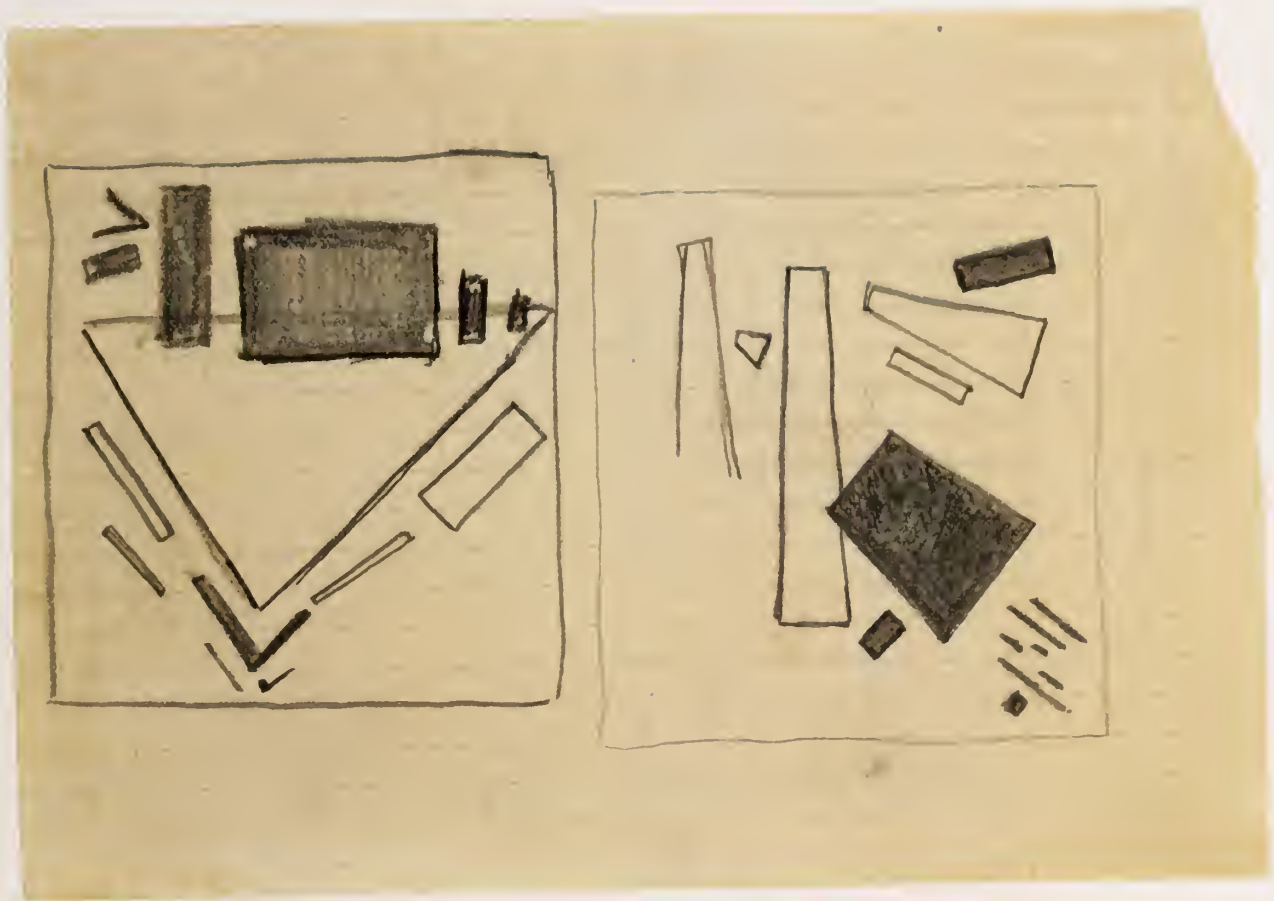
DYNAMIC SUPREMATISM (SUPREMUS NO. 57)
1916, oil on canvas, 31 1/4 x 31 1/4 inches (80.2 x 80.3 cm)
Tate Modern, London, Purchased with assistance from the
Friends of the Tate Gallery 1978
T02319



YELLOW AND BLACK (SUPREMUS NO. 58)
1914, oil on canvas, 20 1/2 x 24 1/2 inches (51.8 x 62.2 cm)
State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg
Inv. No. ZhB-168

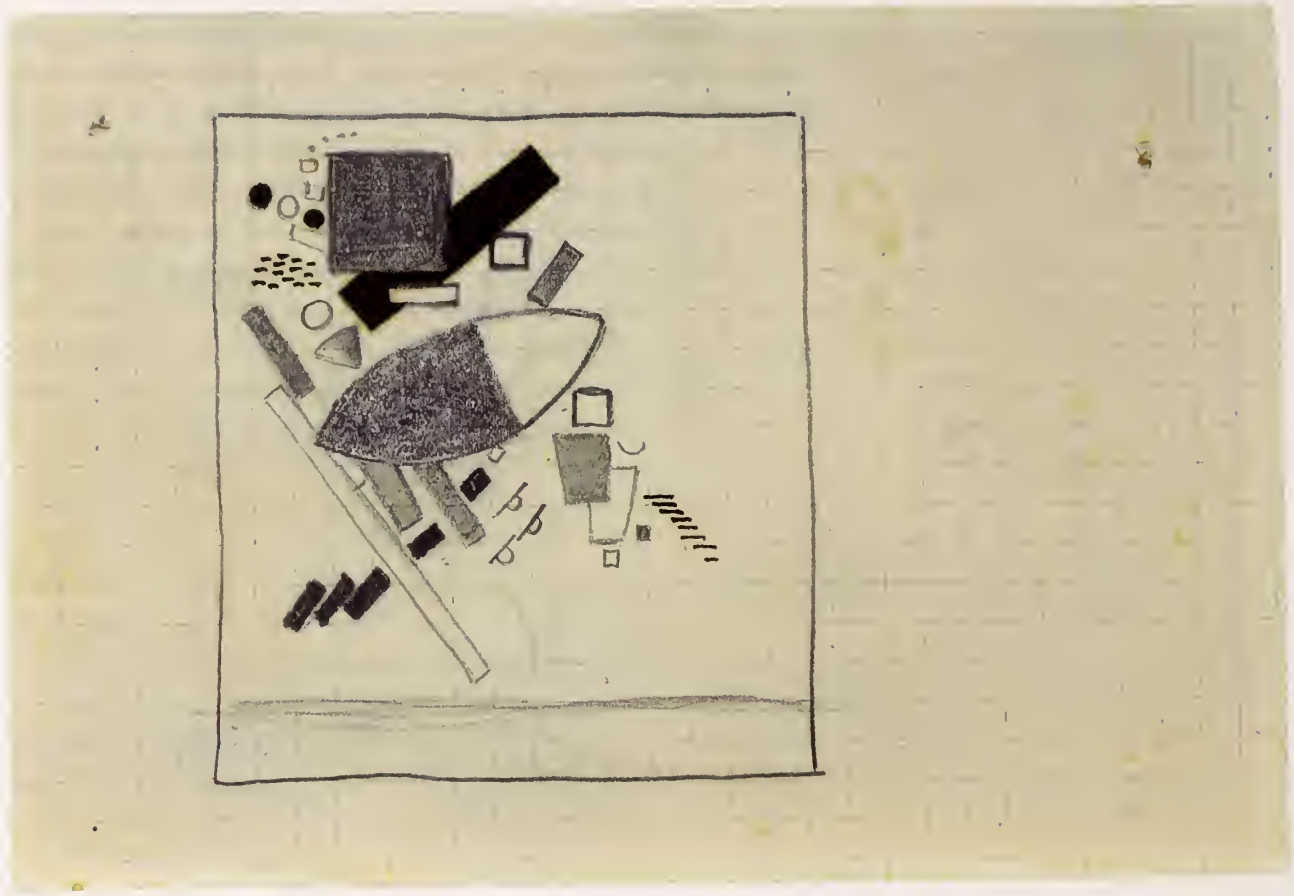


SUPREMATIST COMPOSITION
1915-16, pencil on graph paper,
4 1/4 x 5 1/4 inches (10.7 x 14.6 cm)
Private collection, courtesy Galerie Gmurzynska, Zug



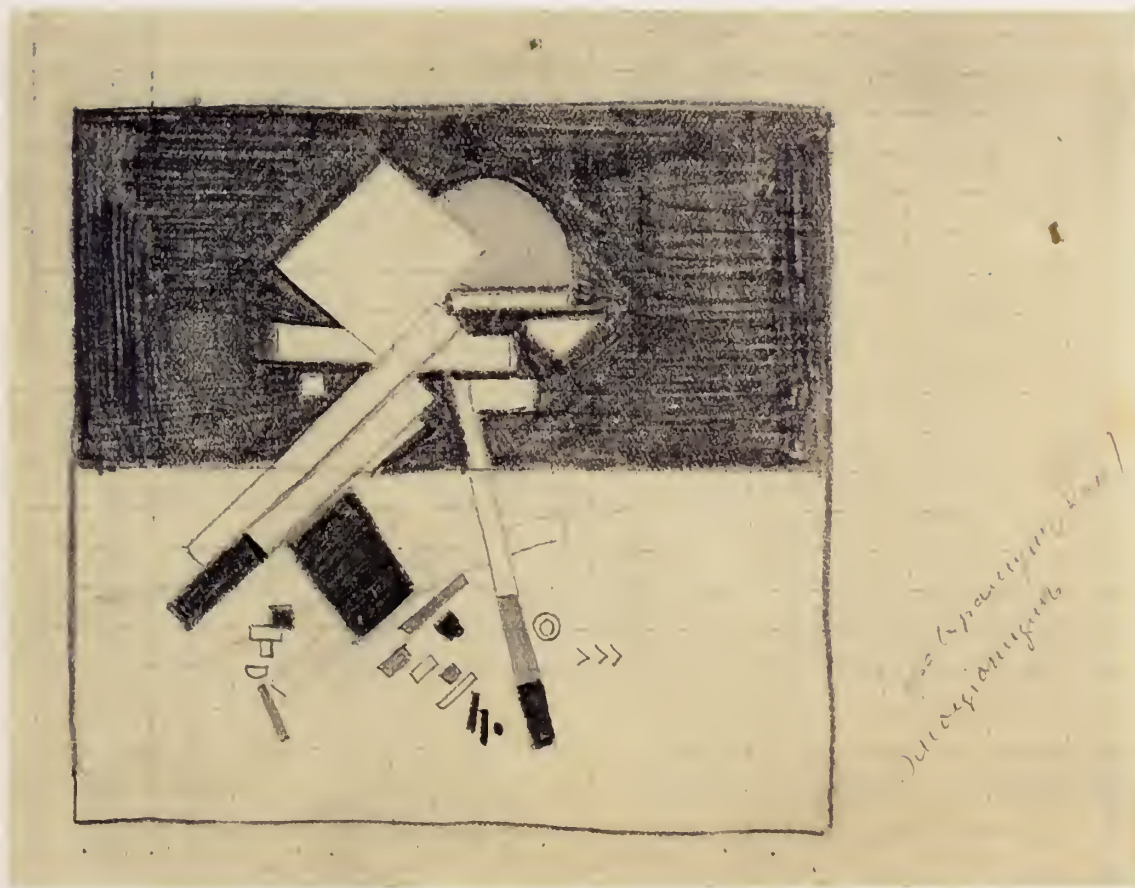
COMPOSITION 11 R

1957, 16 x 20 cm (6 1/4 x 7 7/8 in.)
400 g (14 oz) paper, pencil, ink
Artista come firma e data, titolo e numero di catalogo



SQUARE AND OVAL (CONSTRUCTION 20 I)

ca. 1915-16, pencil on graph paper,
4 1/4 x 6 3/4 inches (11.2 x 16.3 cm)
Museum Ludwig, Cologne, Ludwig Collection
Dep. Slg. L. 1979/46



SUPREMATISM HORIZONTALLY DIVIDED

1916 pen and graph paper

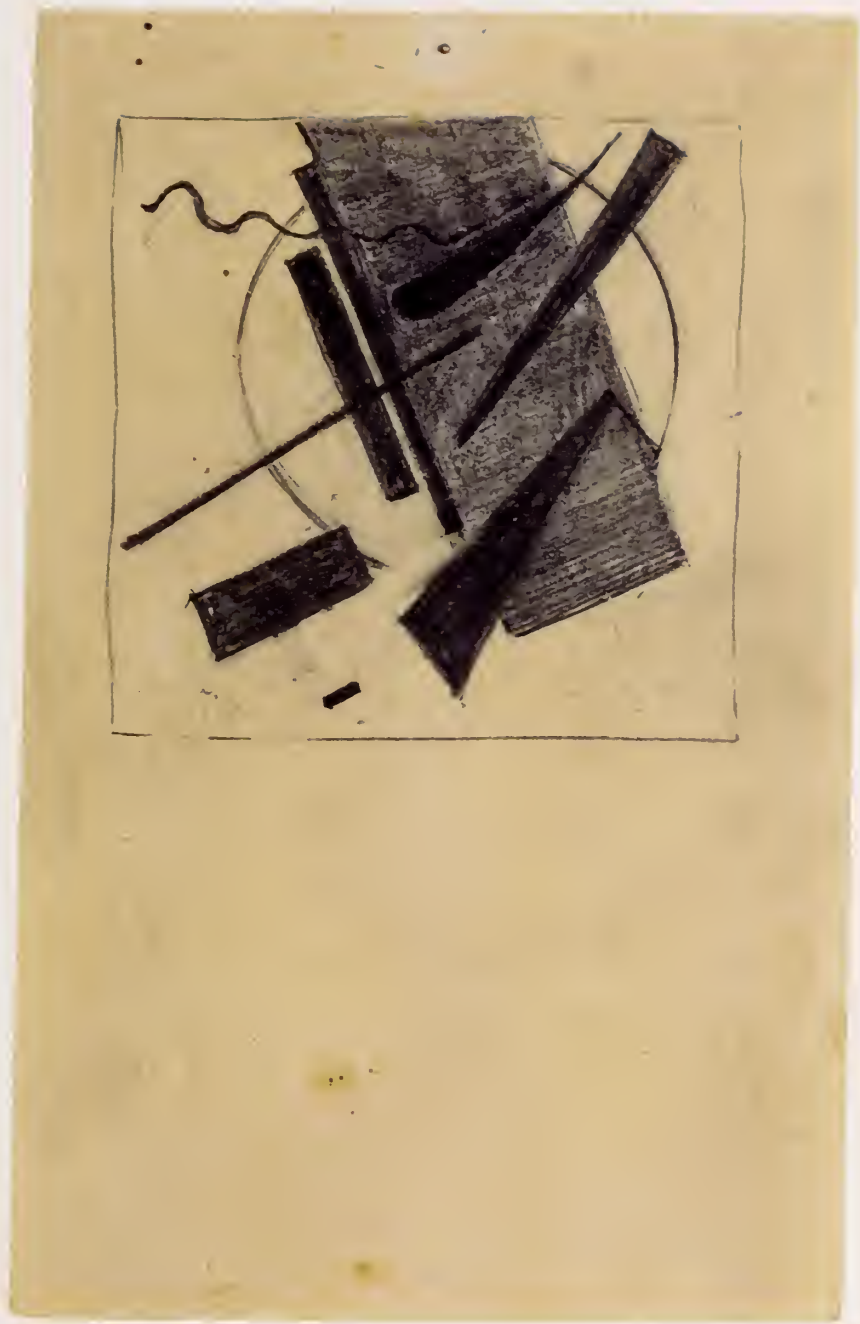
4 1/2 x 6 1/2 inches (11.2 x 14.5 cm)

Four datums (total) enter Museum of Modern Art

Amsterdam Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam

GMBF 4 200119

UNTITLED (STUDY FOR SUPREMUS NO. 55)
1916, pencil on paper, 6 1/4 x 4 1/4 inches (16.8 x 10.6 cm)
Museum Ludwig, Cologne, Ludwig Collection
Dep Sig L 1979/48



UNTITLED (SUPREMATIST COMPOSITION)
ca. 1916, oil on canvas, 20 3/4 x 20 3/4 inches (53 x 53 cm)
Peggy Guggenheim Collection, Venice
249 35





DYNAMIC SUPREMATISM

1916, oil on canvas,
40 1/4 x 26 1/4 inches (102.4 x 66.9 cm)
Museum Ludwig, Cologne, Ludwig Collection
ML 1294



SUPREMATIST PAINTING
1916
34 x 27 inches (88 x 69 cm)
Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam
A1664

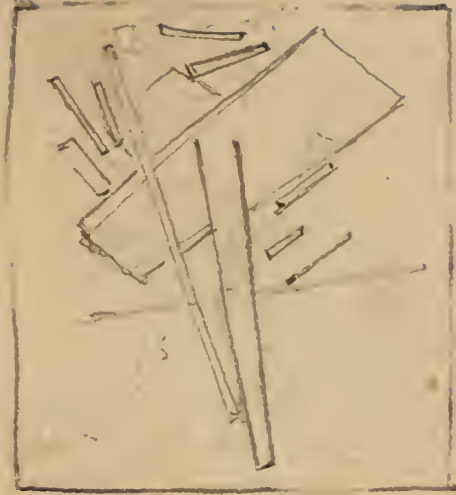
SUPREMATIST PAINTING

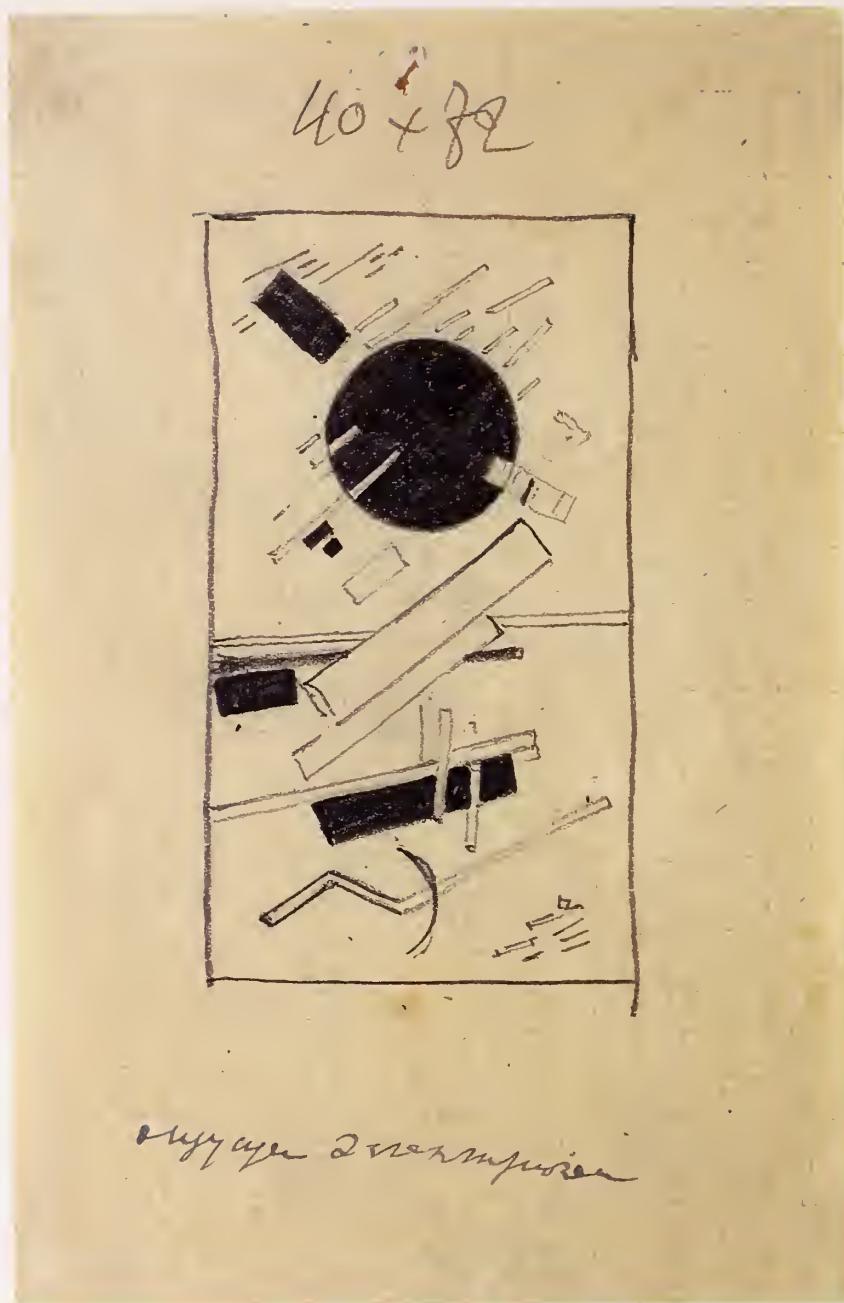
1916–17, oil on canvas,
38 7/8 × 26 1/4 inches (97.8 × 66.4 cm)

The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 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)
819.35

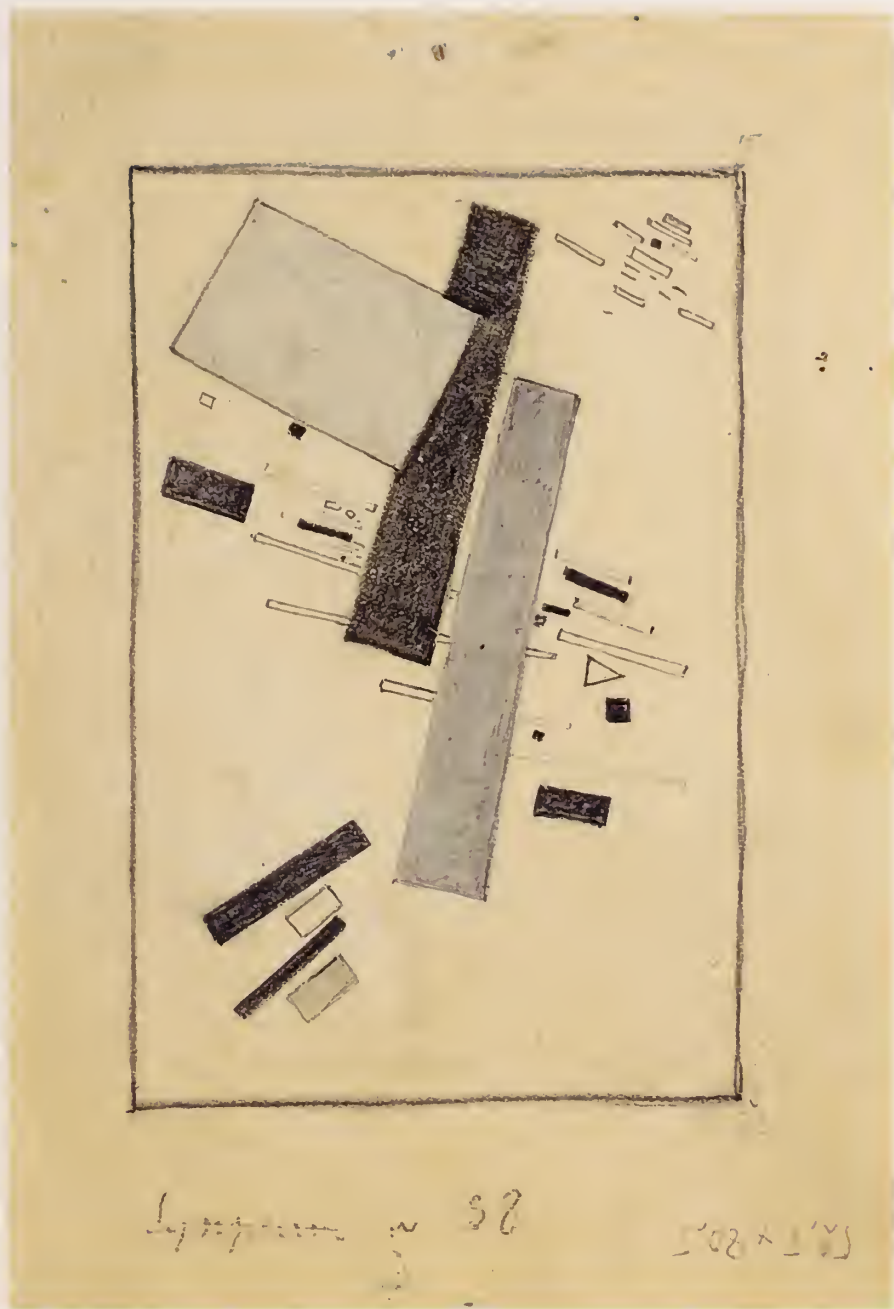


CONSTRUCTION 12 Q
1916, pencil on graph paper
4 1/8 x 4 1/4 inches (16.7 x 11 cm)
Private collection, courtesy Galerie Murzynska, Łódź





SUPREMATISM: SENSATION OF THE ELECTRON
1916, pencil on graph paper,
6 1/4 x 4 inches (15.4 x 10 cm)
Foundation Cultural Center Khardzhiev-Chaga,
Amsterdam/Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam
GMB68 4 2001(41)



SUPREMUS NO 38

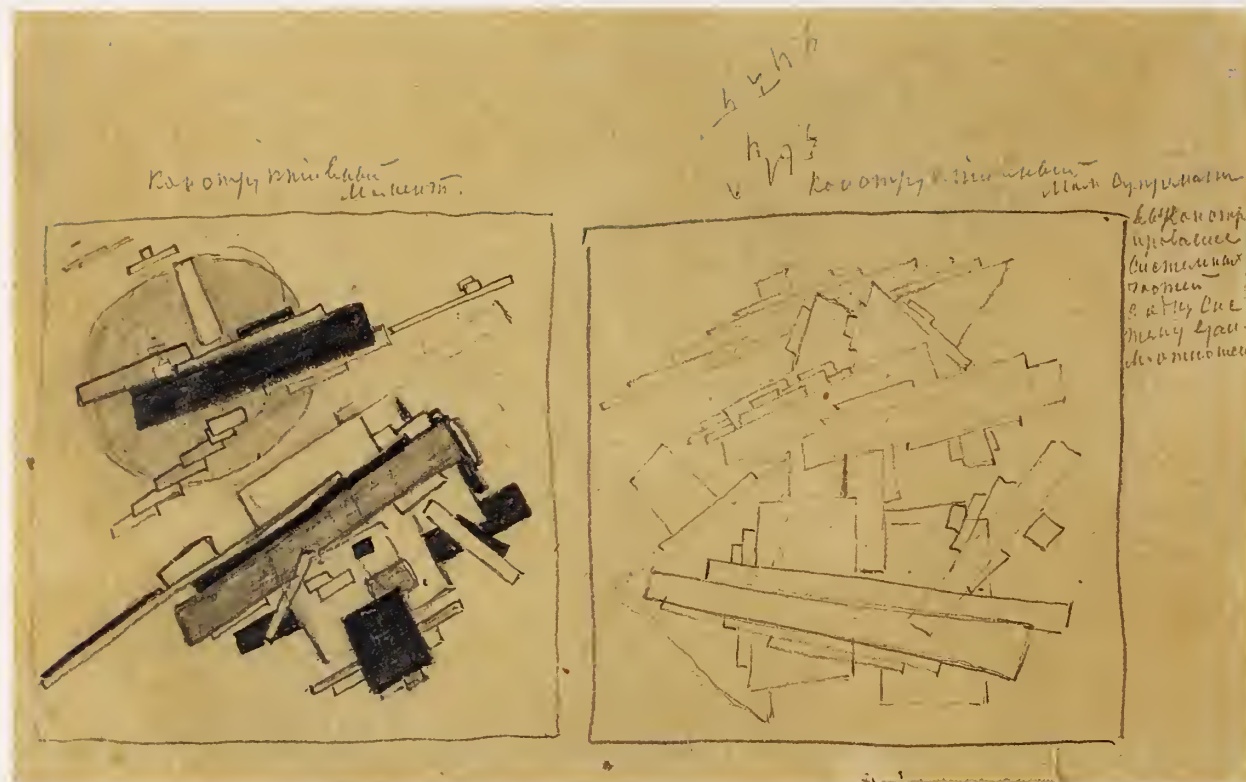
1916 pencil on graph paper

6 1/2 x 4 1/4 in. hes. 16.2 x 11.2 cm

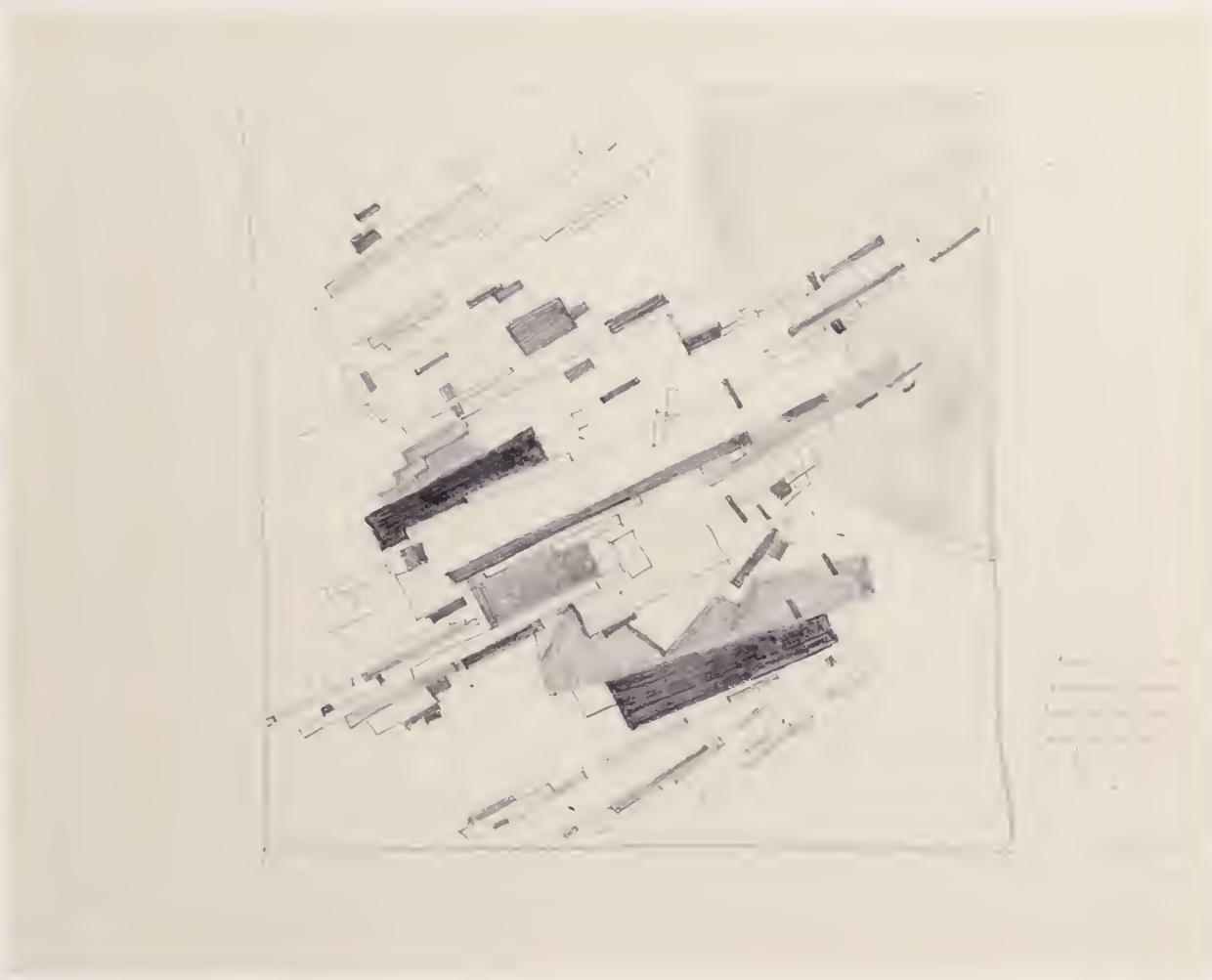
Foundation Cultural Center Klardiev-Groga

Amsterdam Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam

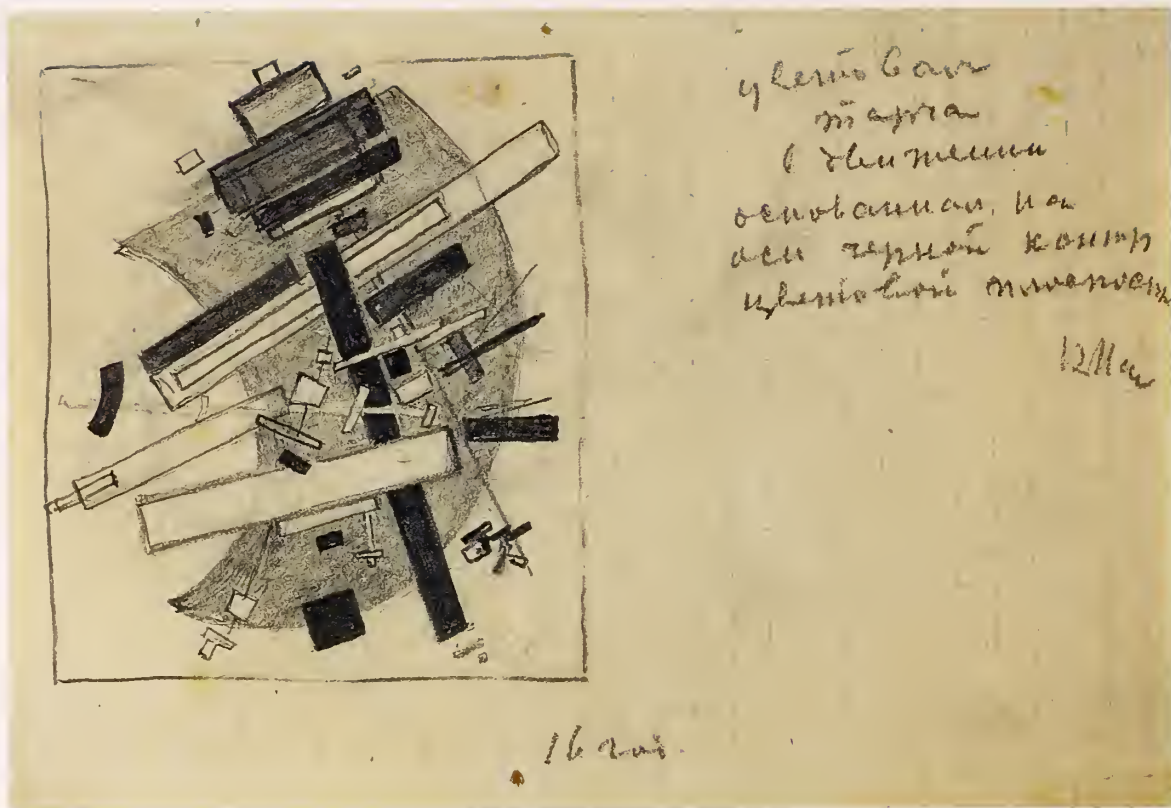
(MA33.4.2001.95)



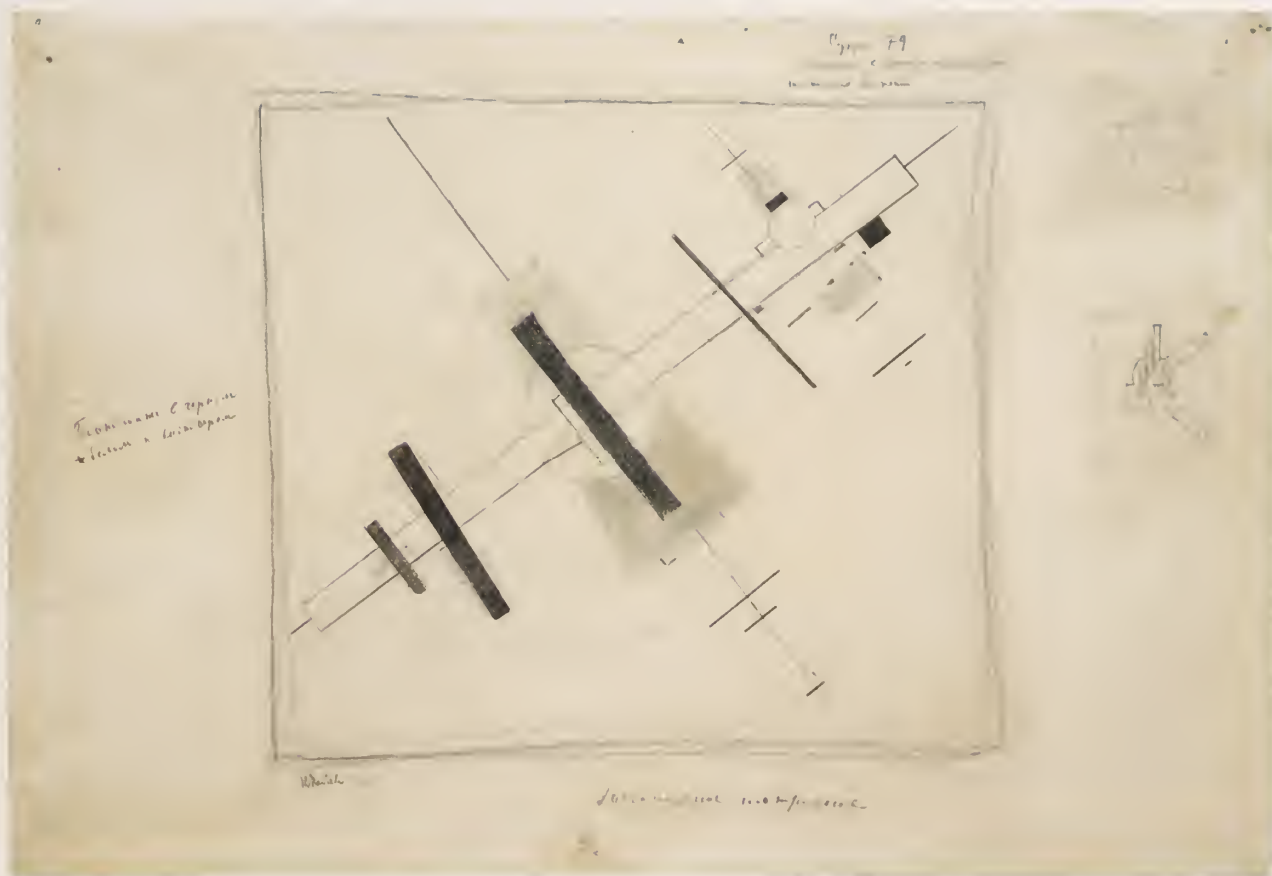
SUPREMATISM. CONSTRUCTIVE MOMENTUM
 (COMPOSITIONS 10 T)
 1917, pencil on graph paper,
 4 1/8 x 6 1/4 inches (10.5 x 16.7 cm)
 Foundation Cultural Center Khardzhiev-Chaga,
 Amsterdam/Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam
 GMB45 4 2001(44)



SUPREMUS NO. 18
1916/17, pen and ink on paper
8 3/4 x 11 in. (22.2 x 27.9 cm)
The Judith Rothschild Foundation, New York



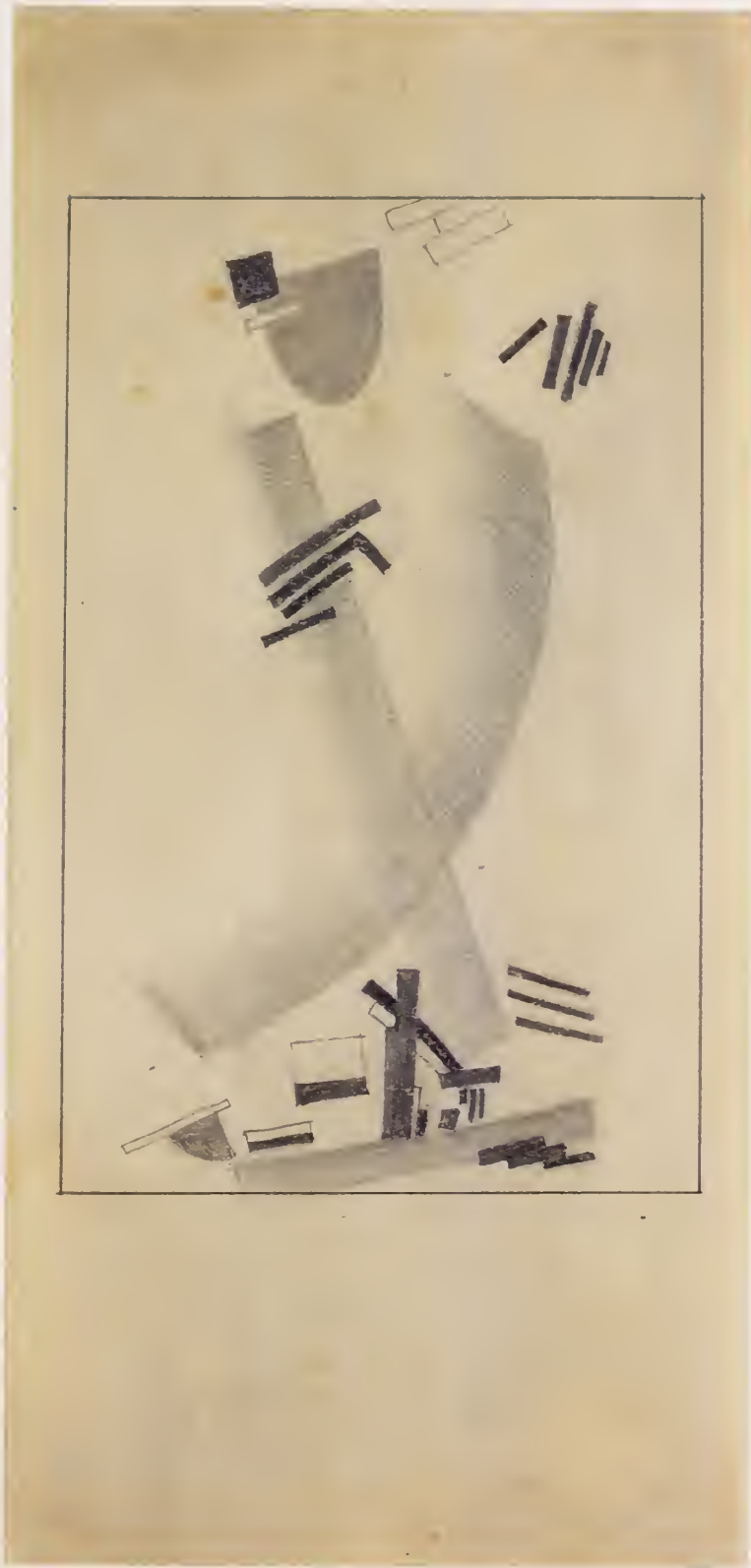
SUPREMUS NO. 58 WITH YELLOW AND BLACK
(PRELIMINARY STUDY)
1916, pencil on graph paper,
4 1/8 x 6 1/8 inches (10.6 x 15.5 cm)
Foundation Cultural Center Khardzhiev-Chaga,
Amsterdam/Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam
GMB101 4 2001(40)



SUPREMATIST DIAGONAL CONSTRUCTION 79
(SUPREMUS NO. 79)

91 x 91 cm (35 7/8 x 35 7/8 in.)
Oil on paper, 1918. 2nd version of a drawing
by Kazimir Malevich. Art. No. 1000. Acquired
in 1949 by agreement with the State of
Kazimir Malevich's estate. Gift of the
Museum of Modern Art, New York, by
the Museum of Modern Art, New York, by
231. 10. 1. 1.

STUDY FOR A COSMIC ARRANGEMENT
ca. 1917, pencil on paper, 8 7/8 × 4 1/4 inches (22 × 10.5 cm)
Museum Ludwig, Cologne, Ludwig Collection
Dep. Sig. L. 1979/31



DISSOLUTION OF A PLANE
1917, oil on canvas, 52 1/4 x 30 3/4 inches (133 x 78 cm)
Private collection, courtesy Galerie Gmurzynska, Zug

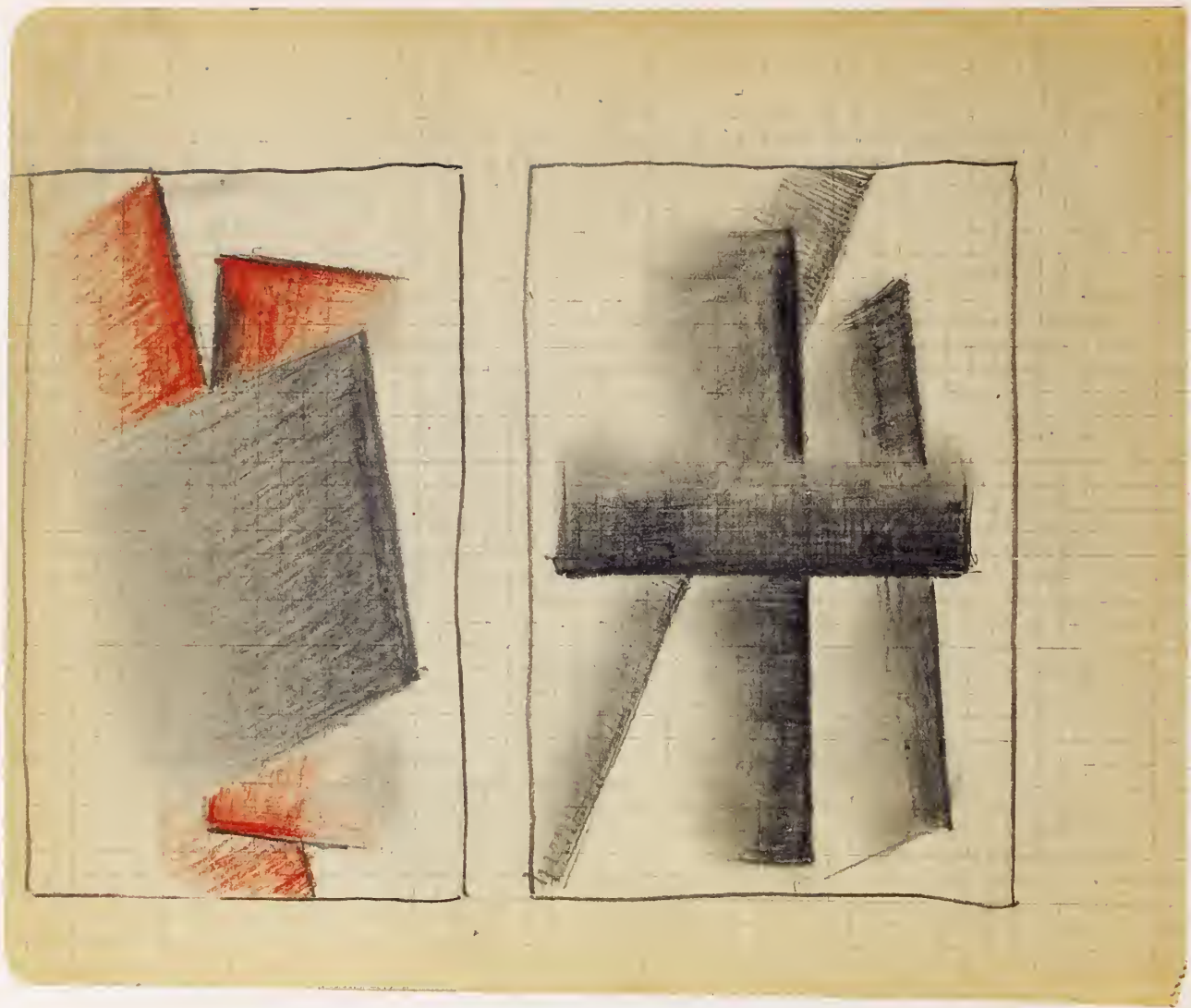


SUPREMATIST PAINTING
1917 18, oil on canvas,
41 3/4 x 27 3/4 inches (106 x 70.5 cm)
Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam
A7670

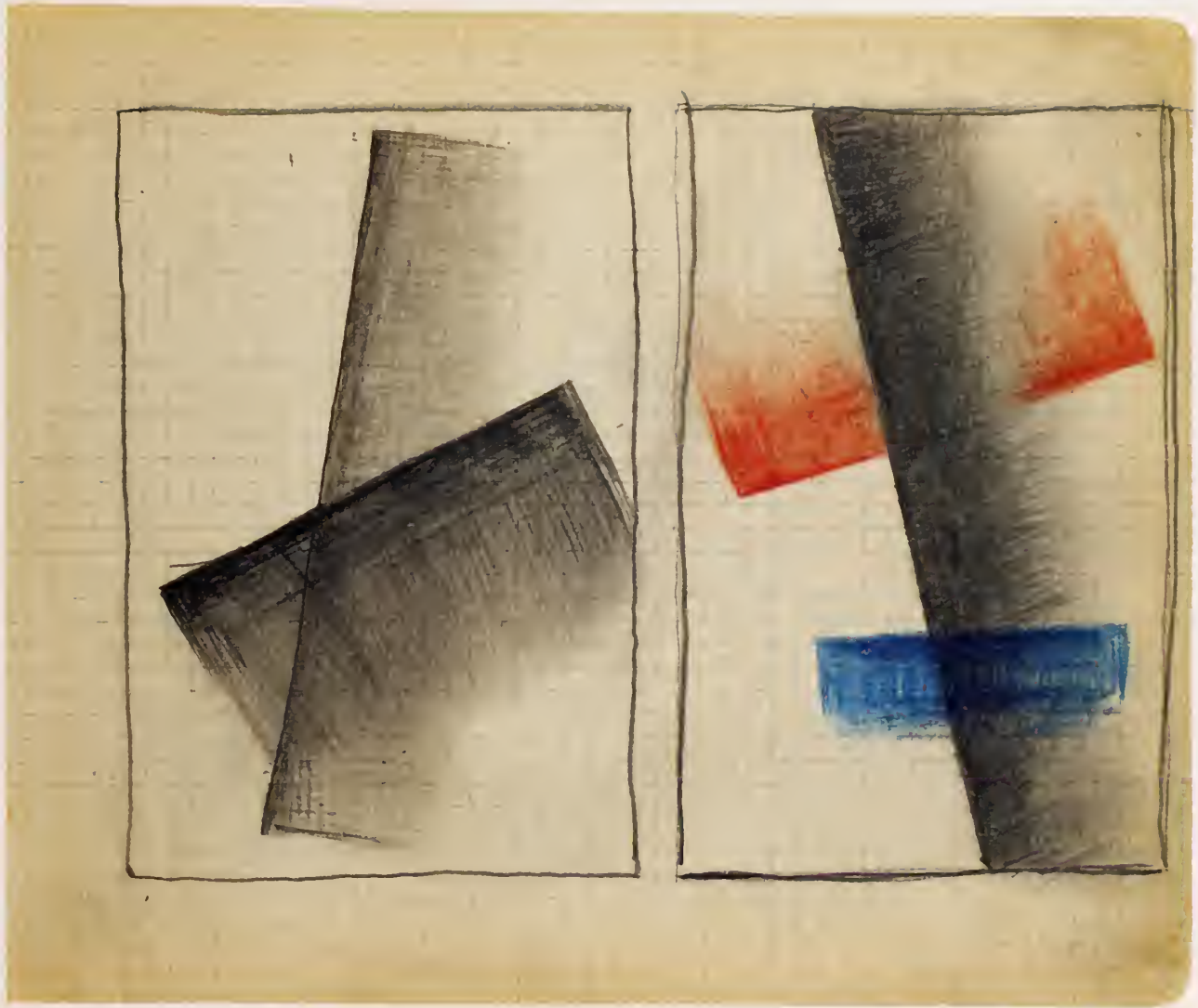


SUPREMATISM NO. 55
(SPHERIC EVOLUTION OF A PLANE)
1917, oil on canvas, 25 3/8 x 19 inches (65.6 x 48.2 cm)
Kawamura Memorial Museum of Modern Art,
Sakura, Japan

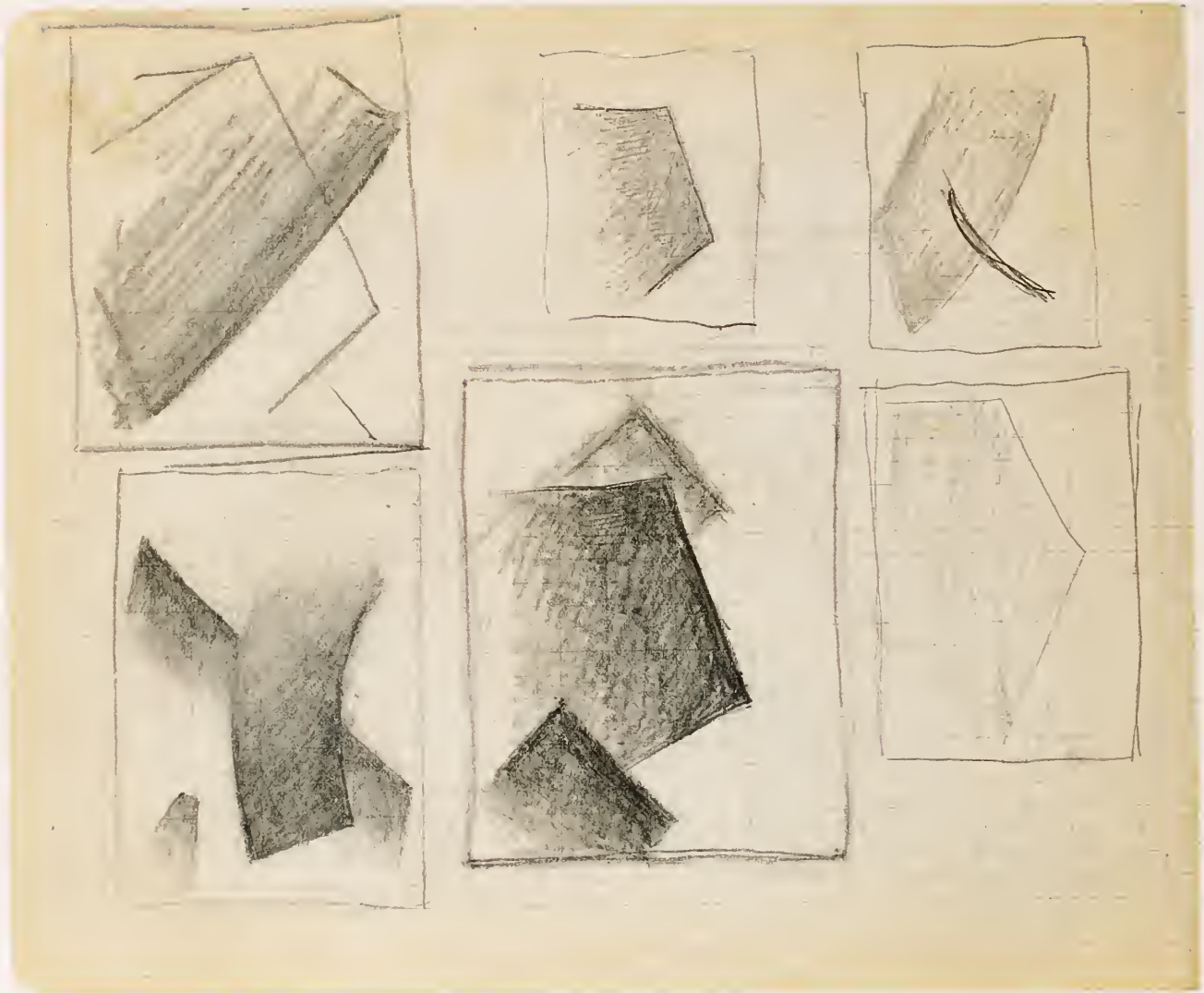




SUPREMATISM: THREE INTERSECTING PLANES,
FADING/SUPREMATISM: FOUR INTERSECTING PLANES,
FADING (PLANES IN DISSOLUTION)
1917, pencil on graph paper,
6 3/4 x 8 1/2 inches (17.3 x 20.7 cm)
Foundation Cultural Center Khardzhiev-Chaga,
Amsterdam/Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam
GMA14.4.2001(56)



SUPREMATISM TWO INTERSECTING PLANES,
FADING/SUPREMATISM THREE INTERSECTING
PLANES, FADING (PLANES IN DISSOLUTION)
91. 1916. Paper, pencil, wash
Fundation Centre for Contemporary Art
Amsterdam/Deutscher Kunstverlag
© MATH 4/2016



SUPREMATISM. INTERSECTING PLANES, FADING
(PLANES IN DISSOLUTION)
1917, pencil on graph paper,
6 3/4 x 8 1/4 inches (17.3 x 20.7 cm)
Foundation Cultural Center Khardzhiev-Chaga,
Amsterdam/Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam
GMA15 4 2001(57)



**DYNAMIC SUPREMATISM
(SPHERIC EVOLUTION OF A PLANE)**

1918, pencil on paper

6 1/4 x 4 1/8 inches (15.8 x 12 cm)

Foundation of Artistic Letter Khadzhibek Ltd.

Amsterdam: Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam

SMB86 4 2001 50

SUPREMATIST COMPOSITION · WHITE ON WHITE
1918, oil on canvas, 31¼ × 31¼ inches (79.4 × 79.4 cm)
The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 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)
817.35

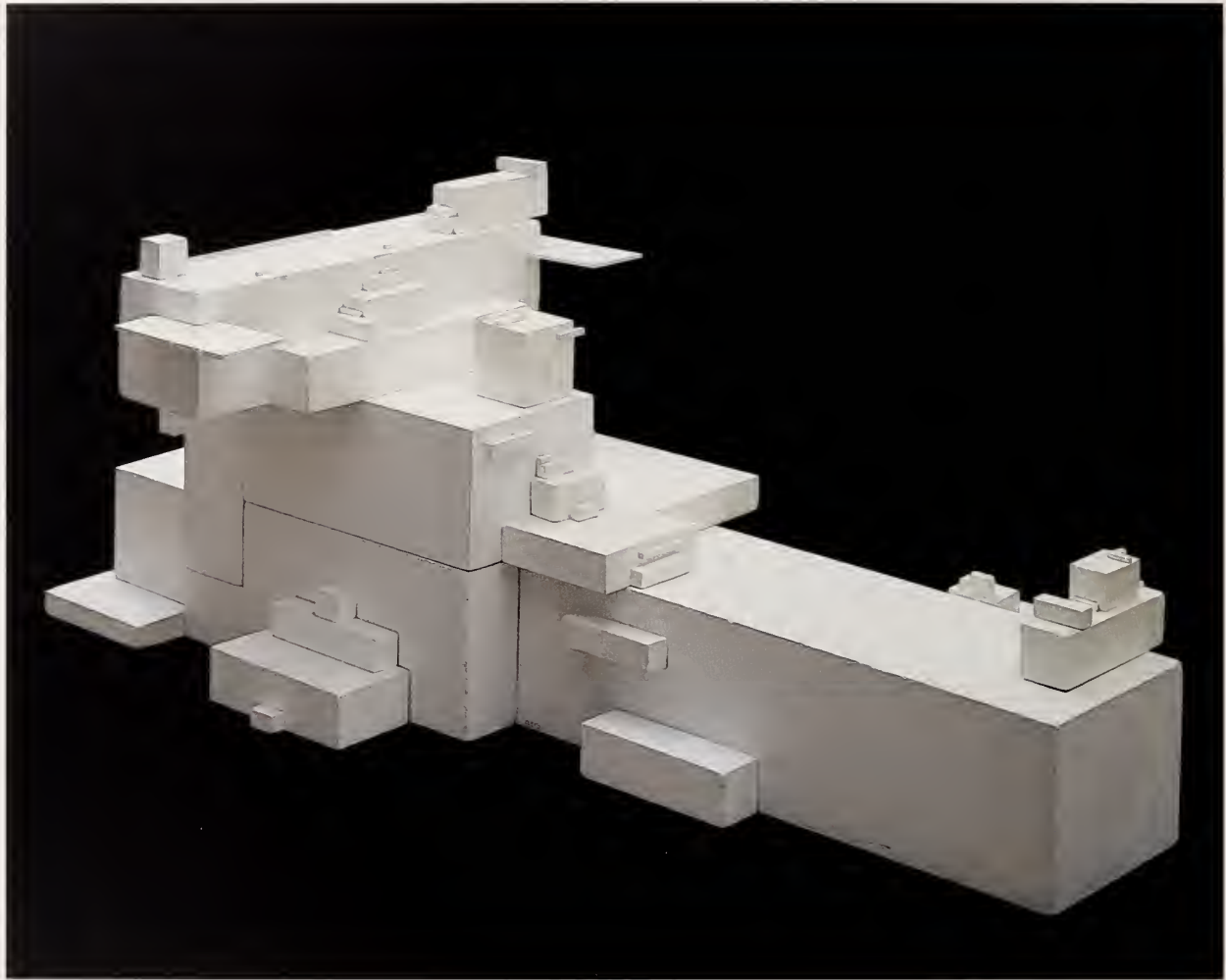




SUPREMATIST PAINTING
(WHITE PLANES IN DISSOLUTION)
1917–18, oil on canvas, 38 ¼ x 27 ½ inches (97 x 70 cm)
Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam
A7666



SUPREMATISM (CONSTRUCTION IN DISSOLUTION)
1912, oil on canvas, 88 cm x 110 cm, collection
Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg
A766



ALPHA ARCHITEKTON

1920 (1925–26), plaster,
12 3/8 x 31 1/4 x 13 3/4 inches (31.5 x 80.5 x 34 cm)
State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg
Inv. No. Ck-2052

BETA ARCHITEKTON

ca. 1926, reconstructed by Poul Pedersen in 1978, plaster,
10 3/4 x 23 1/2 x 39 1/4 inches (27.3 x 59.5 x 99.3 cm)
Musée national d'art moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris
Inv. AM 1978-877







GOTA

1923, reconstructed in 1989, plaster

33 1/2 x 18 1/8 x 22 1/8 inches (85.2 x 48 x 58 cm)

Musée national d'art moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris

Inv. AM 1978-878

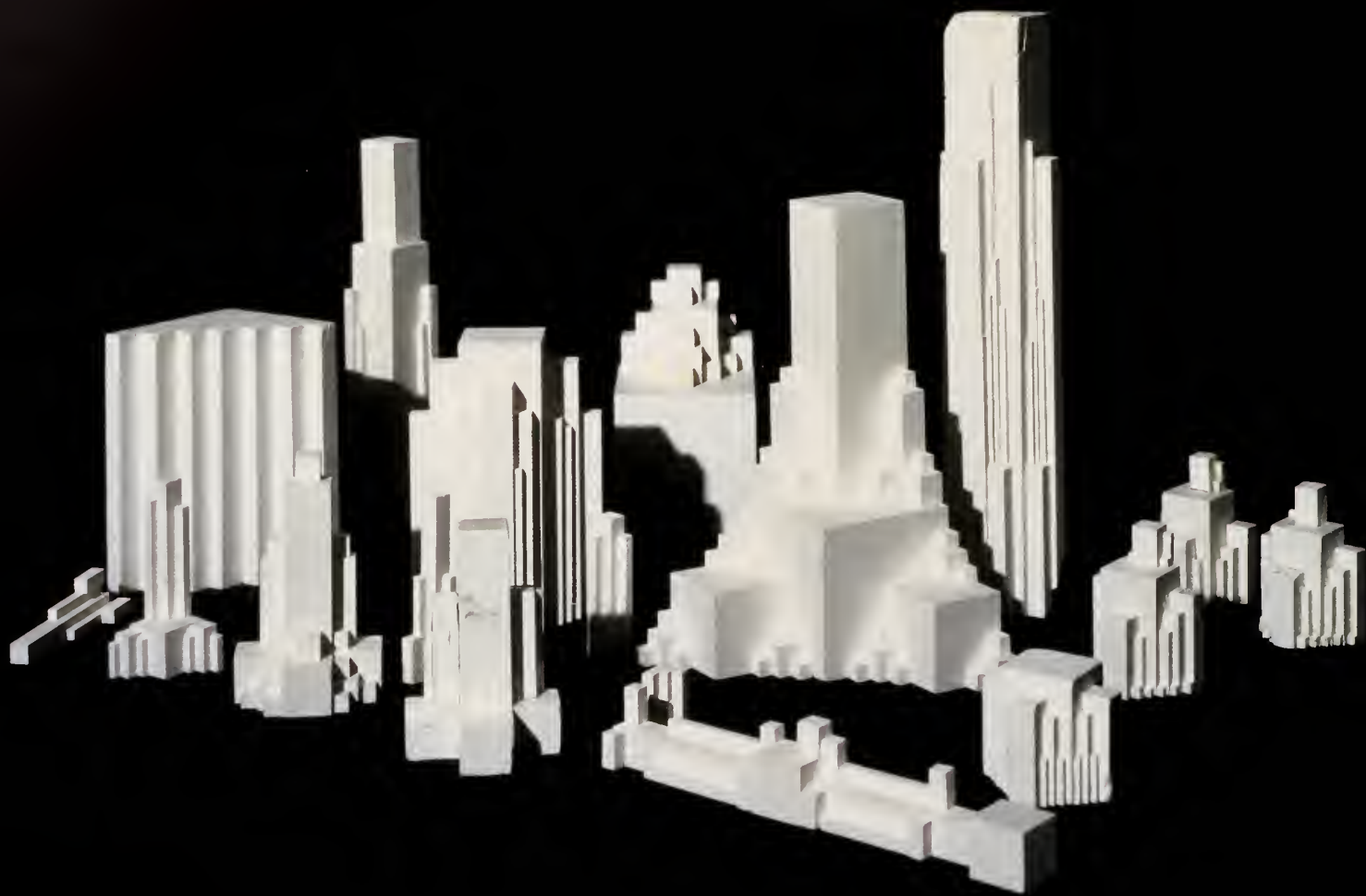
SUPREMATIST ARCHITEKTON

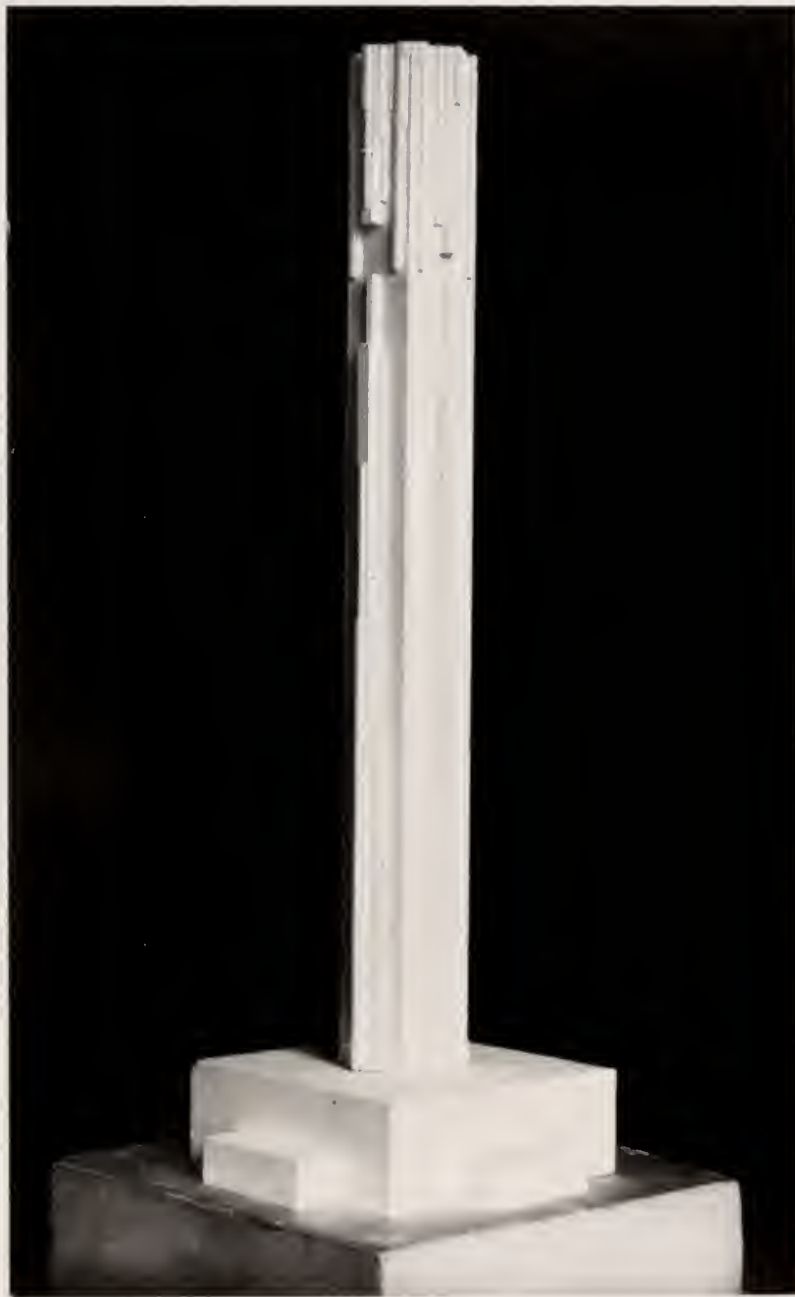
1926, plaster and wood

20 1/2 x 14 1/8 x 15 1/8 inches (52.1 x 36.5 x 39.1 cm)

Museum of Modern Art, Department of Architecture, New York

MA 1939





SUPREMATIST ORNAMENTS

1927 reconstructed by Poul Pedersen (c. 1978), plaster

17 1/4 x 15 1/4 inches (45 x 40 cm)

Musée national d'art moderne - Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris

Inv. AM 1978-881

SUPREMATIST ARCHITECTURAL MODEL

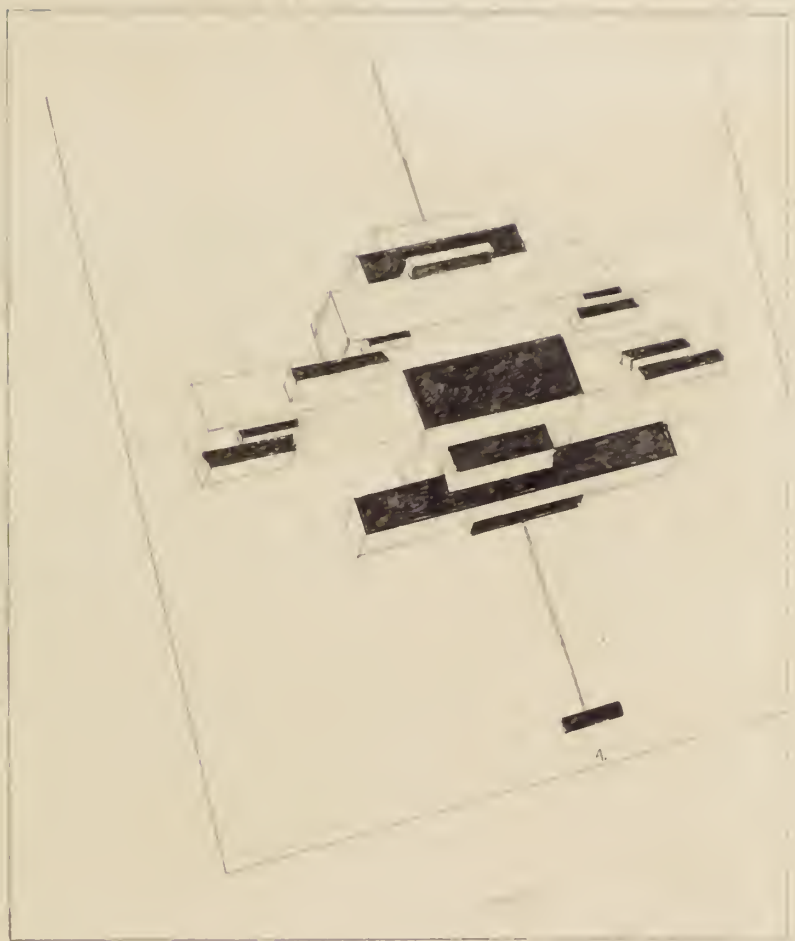
1981 (pâte de verre) 11 1/4 x 11 1/4 inches

86 x 30 x 30 cm

State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow

FUTURE PLANITS (HOUSES) FOR EARTH DWELLERS (PEOPLE)
1923-24, pencil on paper, 17 1/4 x 12 1/4 inches (44 x 30.8 cm)
State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg
Pc-10482

Учебное
здание "Механика" на Санджикмет мосту



44

1913-1924

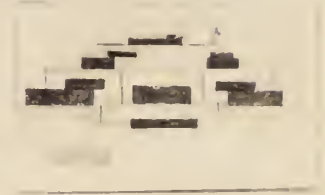
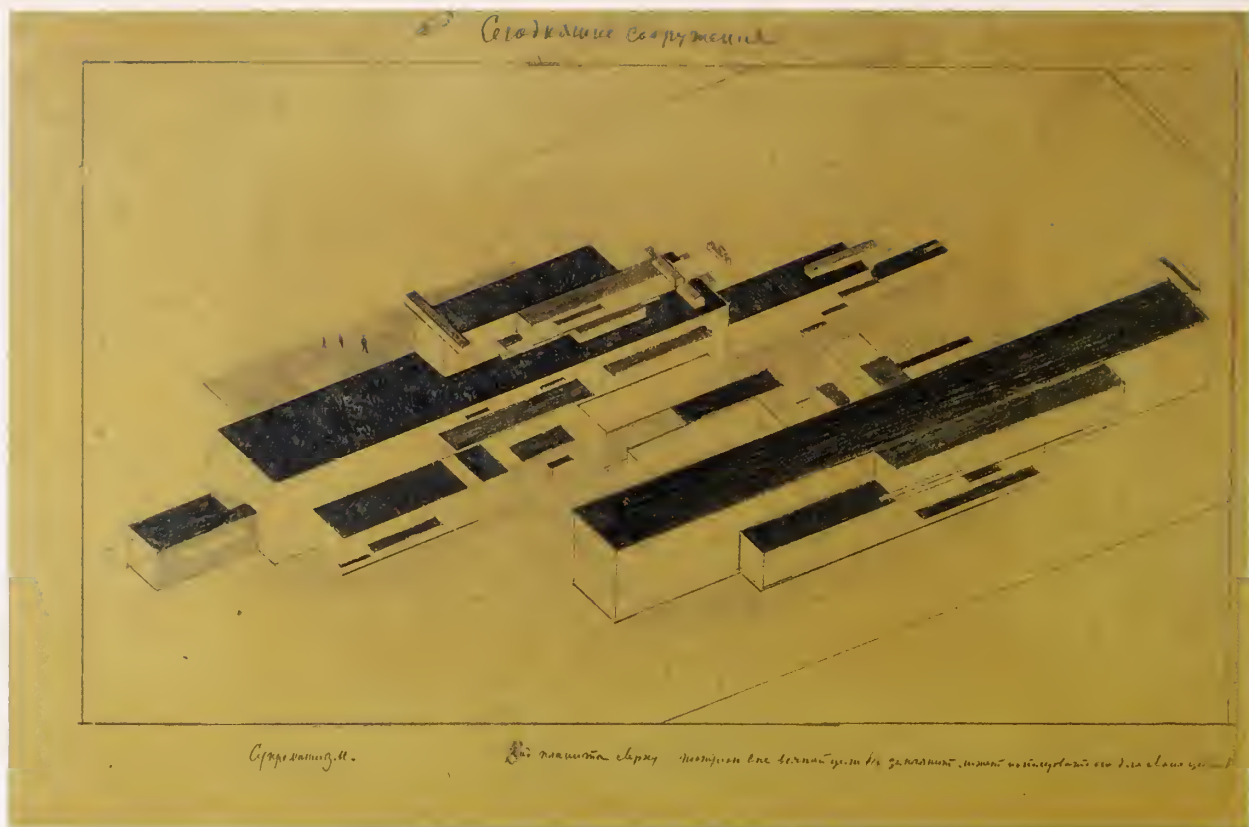


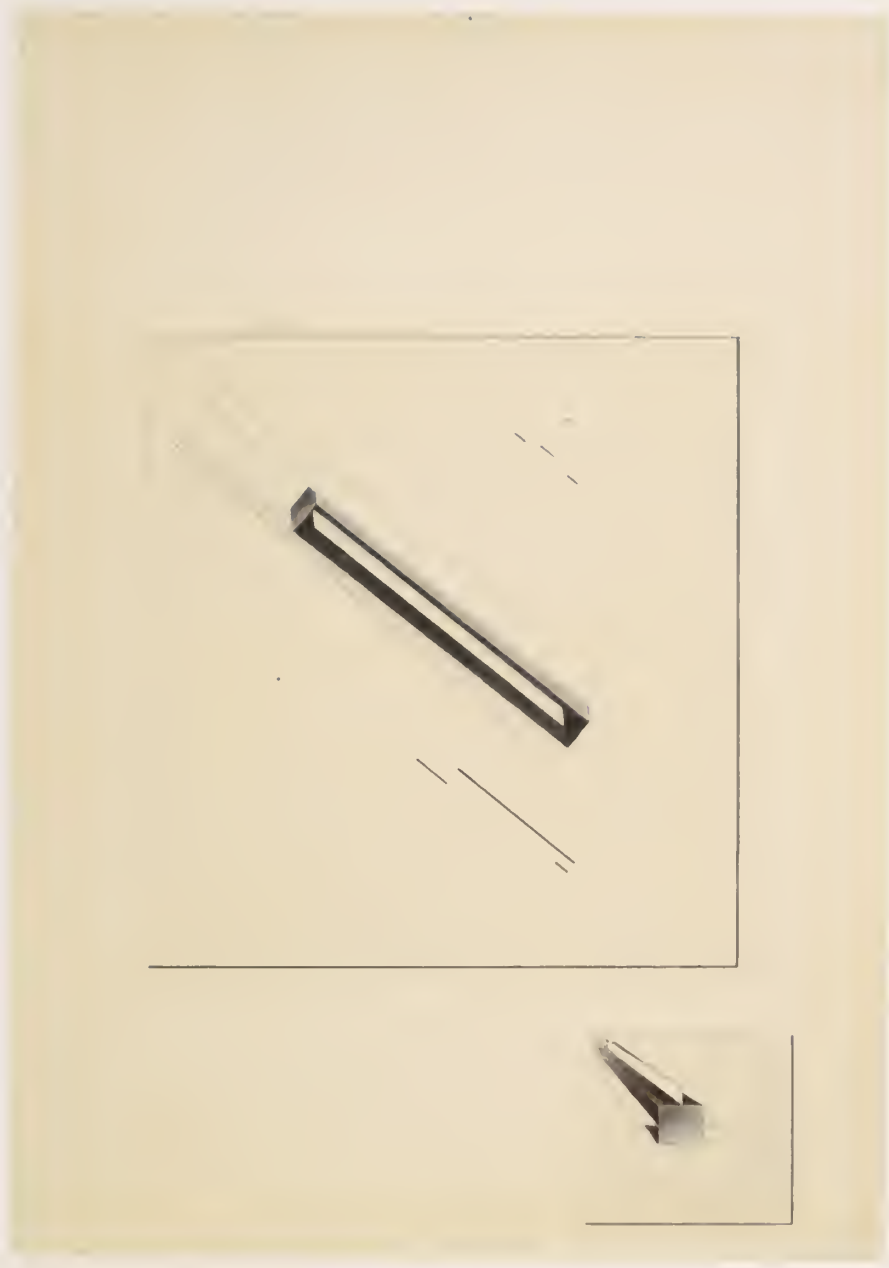


TABLE NO 3 SPATIAL SUPREMATISM

ca. 1916. Architectural composition in spatial forms. Suprematism
 4 x 21 1/2 cm (16 x 8 1/2 in)
 State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg
 © N. P. 1999



MODERN BUILDINGS
1923-24, pencil on paper
14 1/4 x 21 1/4 inches (36 x 53.5 cm)
Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam
A768B



CONSTRUCTION TWO VIEWS

ca. 1945, 26 perspective view (left)

1946, 1 perspective view (right)

Courtesy of the Bunko, Katsuno, Moriuchi, & Kawai (BKMK)

Art Museum, Cambridge, MA. Gift to the Museum of

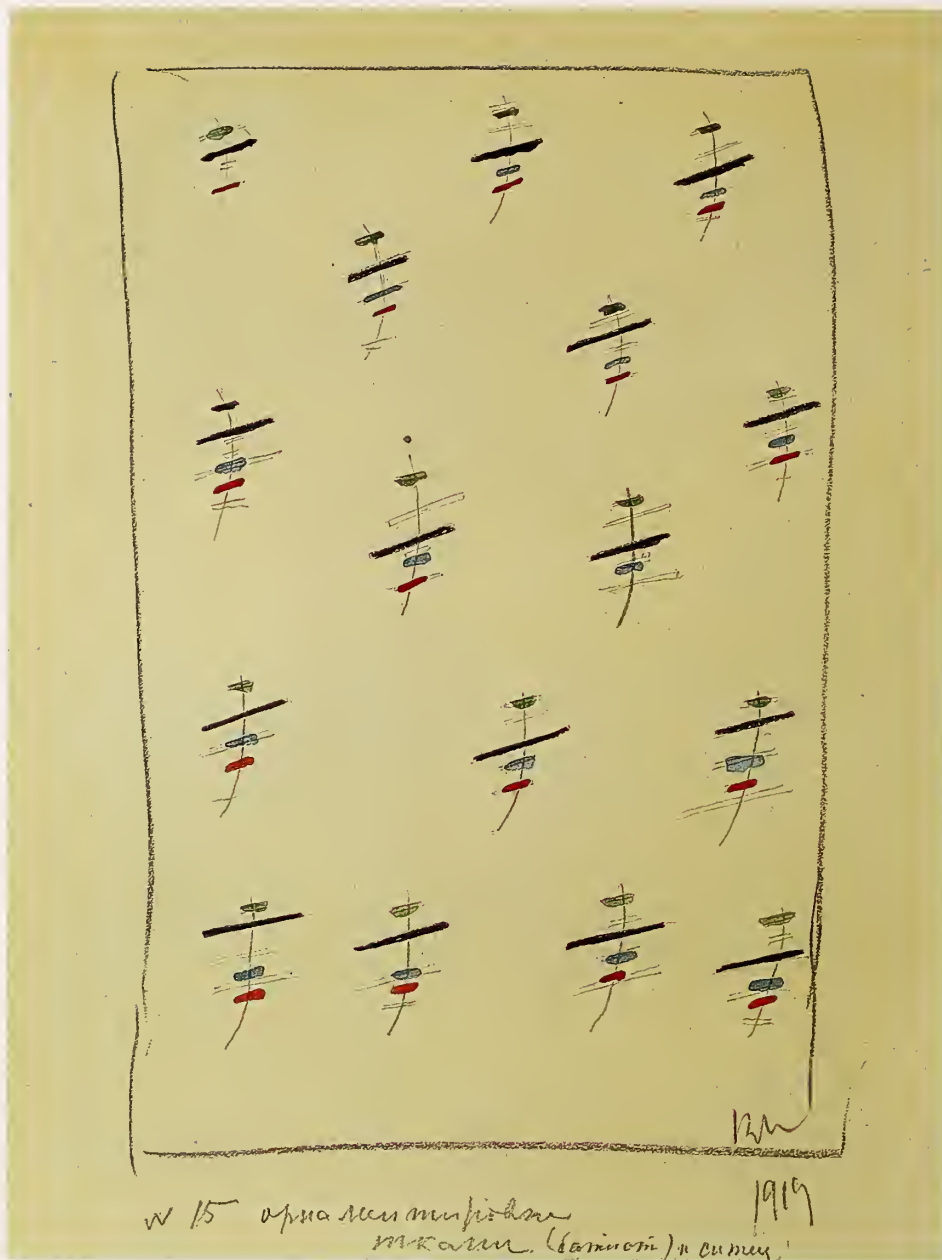
Art by the Estate of Dr. Akiyoshi Moriuchi

1980, 247

SUPREMATIST DESIGN (AERIAL VIEW OF A
LANDSCAPE WITH SUPREMATIST ELEMENTS)
ca 1928, pencil on paper, 7 3/4 x 7 inches (20 x 17.8 cm)
Museum Ludwig, Cologne, Ludwig Collection
Dep Sig L 1979/34

84.





FABRIC ORNAMENT NO. 15

1919, watercolor and pencil on paper.

14 x 10 3/4 inches (35.6 x 27 cm)

State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg

Inv. No. Pc-973



FABRIC ORNAMENT
1271
1911

114



Силуэти арха-
ичны, но в духе
ко стилю той же
вещи в нем како-
длиннее будут
свободы, единства
их формы и цвета
по этому, Миломан
Скултура арха
ична, но в духе
Ты не считаешь
иногда себя, стилю
и стиль охватывает
ко классицизму про-
шлого, но в духе
Ты не считаешь
Современный Союз
Ты не считаешь
и формируются
современный духу
В. М. А.

1923г.

Силуэти архаичны, но в духе

Принцип в искусстве, что новал архитектура будущего
примет вид формы супрематизма, но в духе
Свободы и все искусство формы стиля в духе
с архитектурной формой, это же духу
Миломан. В. М. А.

DESIGN FOR A SUPREMATIST DRESS
1923, watercolor on paper,
7 1/2 x 6 1/2 inches (19 x 17 cm)
State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg
Inv. No. PCB-33

115



Гармония красок
 архитектурных
 форм в парадной
 мебели студии кубизма
 а также архитектура
 или супрематизма. Не
 каменная или оштукатуренная
 или кубизма, но
 требует к себе смен
 существующей мебели
 по суду, пластик и
 и мебели. Предлагает
 материал, это не
 архитектура будет
 и мебель и материалы
 для супрематизма
 гармоничной функциональной
 формы, а для нас
 пластик, со вкусом
 стили по уютному
 контрасту
 В. Малевич
 1923

DESIGN FOR A SUPREMATIST DRESS
 1923 watercolor on paper
 State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg
 inv. no. 1923/10



CUP
 1923, porcelain
 2 1/8 x 4 3/8 x 2 1/8 inches (17.2 x 12.5 x 6 cm)
 State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg
 Cf-27

CUP
 1923, porcelain
 2 1/8 x 4 3/8 x 2 1/8 inches (6.1 x 11 x 5.3 cm)
 State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg
 Cf-517 a



CUPS AND SAUCER

1920s
cup, 100 g, 4 in. diameter, 100 g, 100 g
cup, 100 g, 4 in. diameter, 100 g, 100 g
cup, 100 g, 4 in. diameter, 100 g, 100 g
cup, 100 g, 4 in. diameter, 100 g, 100 g
cup, 100 g, 4 in. diameter, 100 g, 100 g

TEAPOT AND LID
1923, porcelain.
6¼ × 8¼ × 3½ inches (16 × 22.2 × 8.8 cm)
State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg
Cf-1344 a, b



SUPREMATISM OF THE MIND
(SUPREMATISM OF THE SPIRIT)
1920, oil on panel,
21 7/8 x 15 1/4 inches (55.6 x 38.7 cm)
Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam/Instituut Collectie Nederland, Rijswijk
4 2001 (1) S&B/SK





SUPREMATISM (HIERATIC SUPREMATIST CROSS)
1920-21, oil on canvas, 33 1/4 x 27 3/4 inches (84 x 69.5 cm)
Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam
A7662



SUPREMATISM (WHITE SUPREMATIST CROSS)
1920, oil on canvas, 34 1/4 x 27 inches | 88 x 68.5 cm
Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam
A7667



SUPREMATISM (MYSTIC SUPREMATISM)

1920-22, oil on canvas.

28½ × 20¼ inches (72.5 × 51 cm)

Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam

A7669



SUPREMATISM (MYSTIC SUPREMATISM)

1920-22 | Oil on canvas
19.1 x 23.1 inches | 100.5 x 60.7 cm
Frederik Museum, Amstelveen, the Netherlands
A7668



SUPREMATISM. FEMALE FIGURE
1928–29, oil on canvas,
49 1/2 x 41 3/4 inches (126 x 106 cm)
State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg
Zh-9493



LEFT
SUPREMATISM. FEMALE FIGURE
1928–29, oil on plywood.
33 1/4 x 18 1/4 inches (84.5 x 48 cm)
State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg
Zh-9397

ABOVE
FIGURE WITH ARMS SPREAD FORMING A CROSS
1930–31, pencil on paper.
14 1/4 x 8 1/4 inches (36 x 22.5 cm)
Museum Ludwig, Cologne, Ludwig Collection
Dep Stq L 1979/41

SUPREMATIST COMPOSITIONS (COMPOSITIONS 1 E)

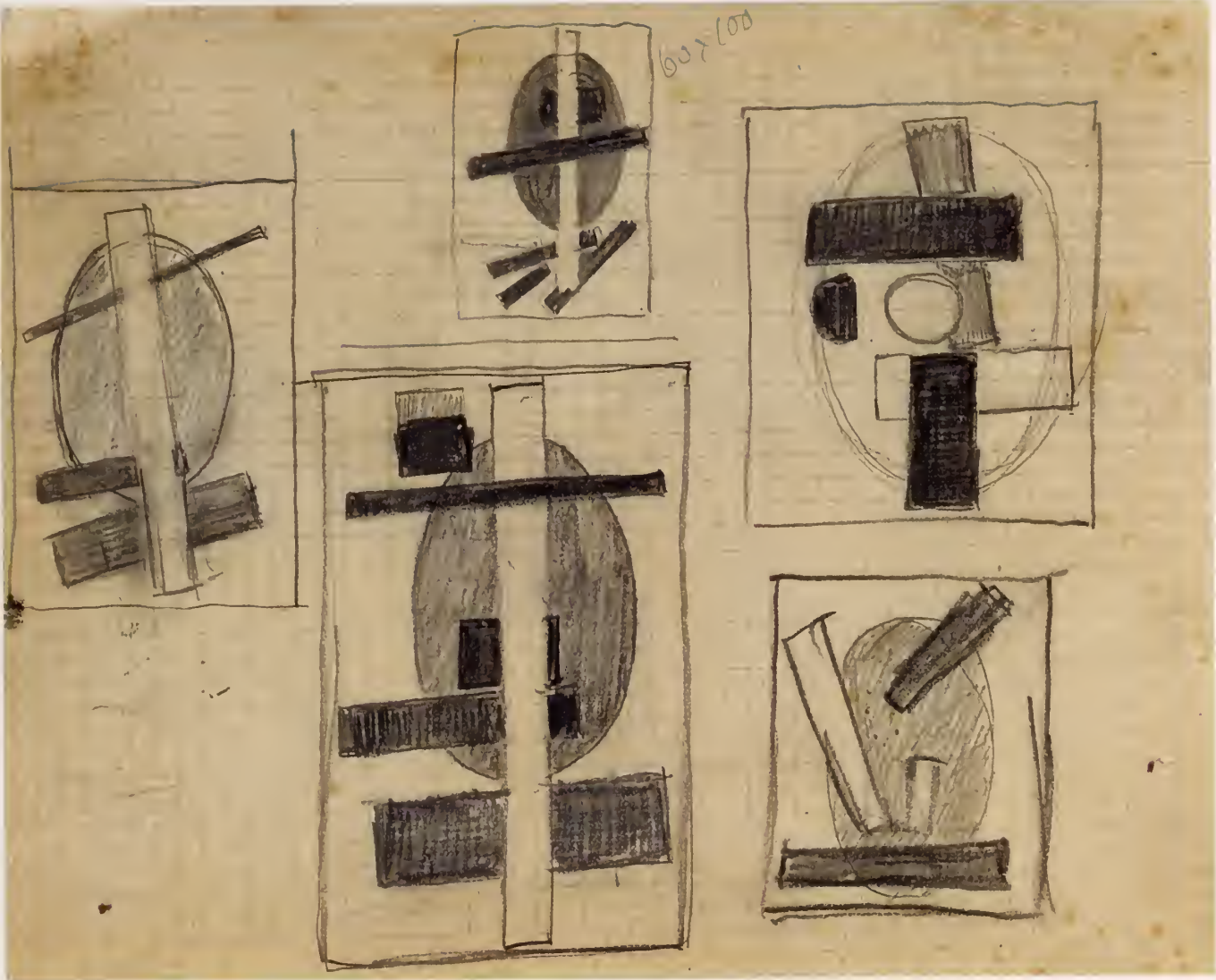
ca. 1917, pencil on paper,

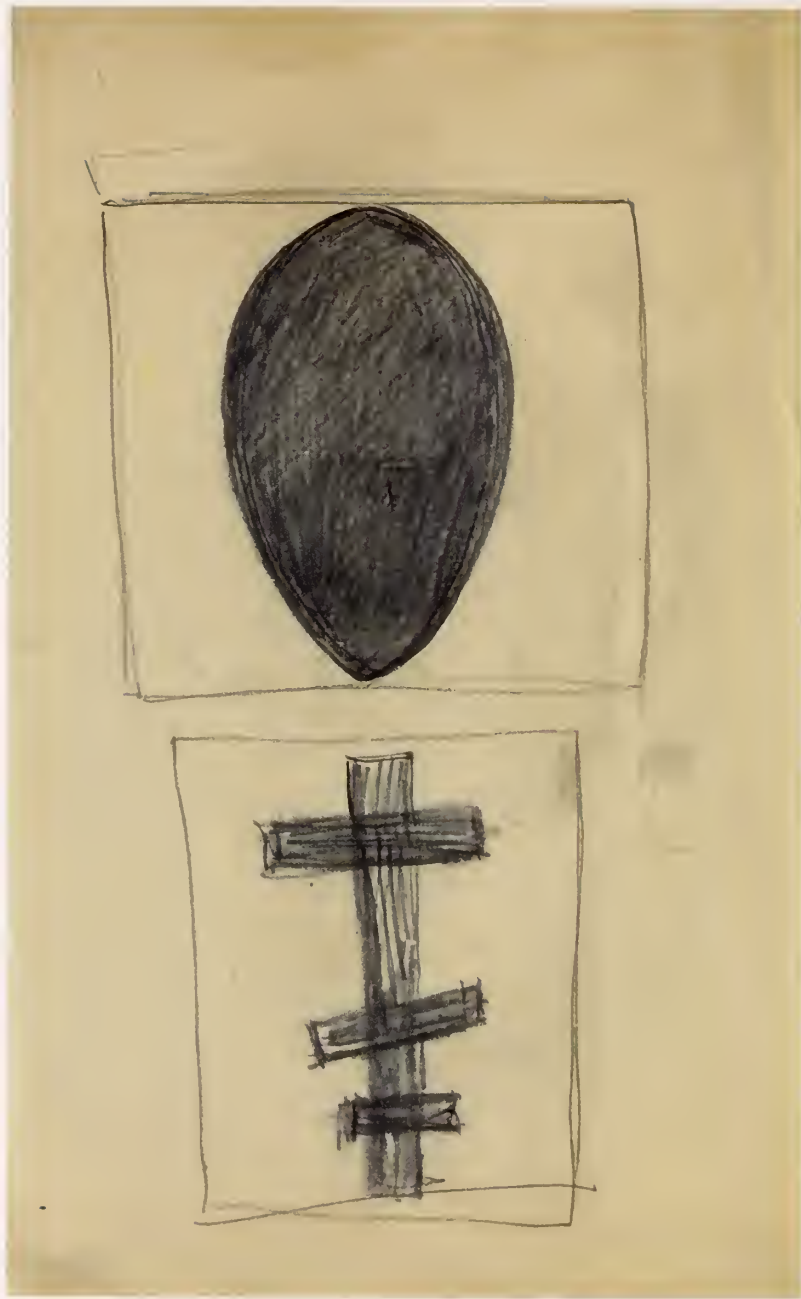
6 3/4 x 8 3/4 inches (17.2 x 20.7 cm)

Museum Ludwig, Cologne, Ludwig Collection

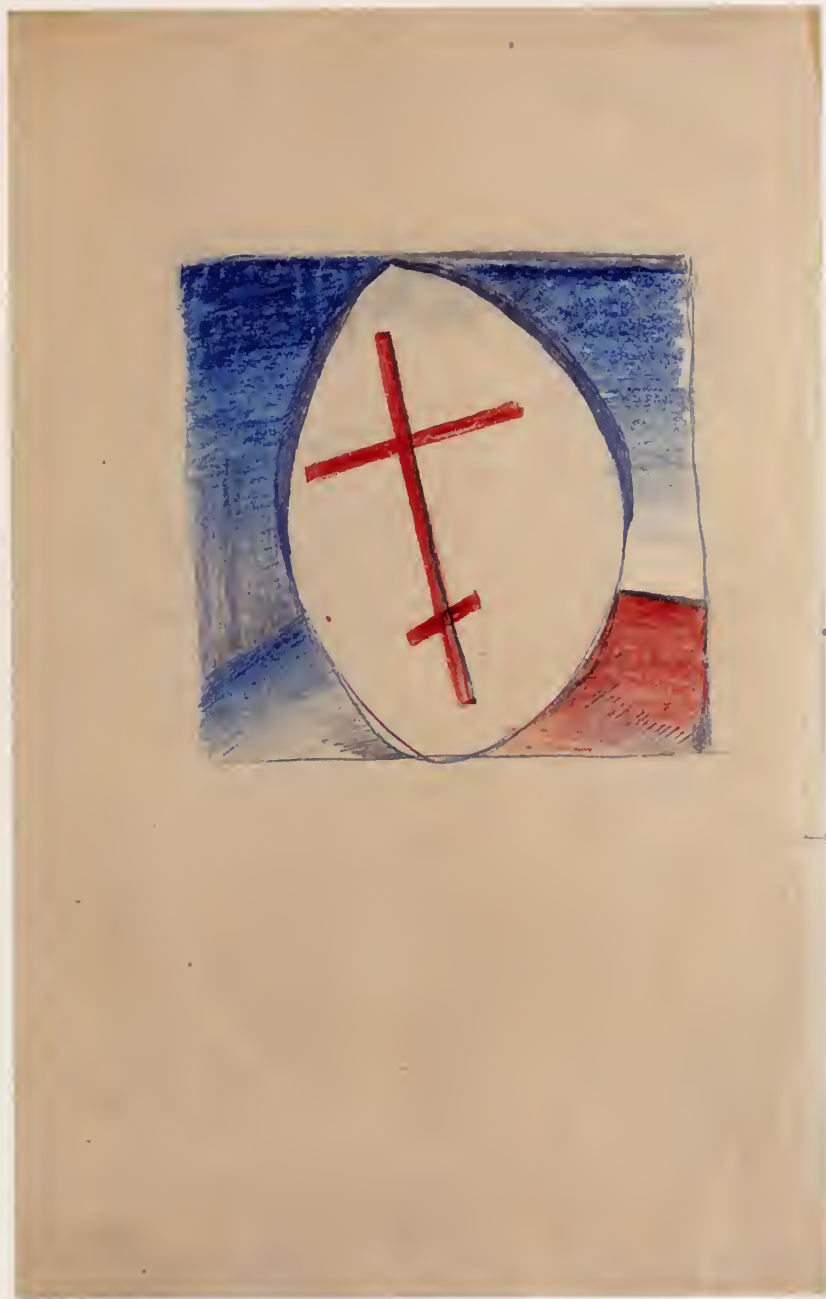
Dep. Sig. L. 1979/29

607/100





UNTITLED (BLACK FACE AND ORTHODOX CROSS)
1930-31, pencil on paper,
14 x 8 1/4 inches (35.5 x 22 cm)
Museum Ludwig, Cologne, Ludwig Collection
Dep Sig. L. 1979/33



HEAD (FACE WITH ORTHODOX CROSS)
1930-31 pencil on paper
14 1/4 x 8 3/4 inches (35.8 x 22.5 cm)
Museum Ludwig, Cologne, Ludwig Collection
Dep 51g L 1979/56

В Коллегию ордена изобразительных
искусств

Заявление

Прому Коллегию прошу рассмотреть дело 18
представу произведений в Студии Малевича
Купцын, в частности дела в связи с ^{оценкой} ~~оценкой~~
Помимо заявки прошу рассмотреть
то же ^{вопрос} ~~вопрос~~ за все дела ~~разрешить~~
или вносить в меру и по делу.

О словах взыскание меня не для
хотелось бы увидеть. Завершил дела
Коллегии, но не все и считать не ~~логично~~
существование мой ~~продолжи~~.

26/V 1920

В Малевич

The following information was largely excerpted from Inna A. Vakhra and Tatiana N. Mikhienko, eds., *Malevich o sebe. Sovremenniki o Maleviche. Pisma. Dokumenty. Vospomnina. Kritika*, 2 volumes, Moscow, RA, 2003 (forthcoming). Includes notes by I. Karasik, I. Lebedeva, A. V. Povelikhina, A. A. Shumov, and A. D. Sarabianov. Vasilii Raktin also contributed original material. In addition, with regards to exhibitions, our research occasionally benefited from Andrei Nakov, Kazimir Malevich. *Catalogue Raisonné*, Paris, Adam Biro, 2002. Where our research differed, we have cited our own findings. When known, works by Malevich listed in the exhibition checklist or catalogue are given. The cited commentaries, when not direct critiques of specific exhibitions, address related questions of Suprematism.

MATTHEW DRUTT

1. Letter from Malevich to Mikhail Matiushin, ca. January 21–28, 1920, Vitebsk

Read it in your own closed circle without any “outsiders” present

Dear Denizens of Pesochnaya Street,¹

My dear Mikhail Vasilievich, I was very happy to receive your letter and I’m also happy that the works of your workshop² have attracted attention and achieved a new perfection.³ I haven’t written to you for a long time, but I also hadn’t received anything from you either—why is that? Thus it happens that we don’t write to each other,⁴ perhaps because we create perfection within ourselves, or seek it within the moist recesses of our brain, which has many hallways and folds containing universes and their perfections. This is the reason why we don’t write to each other and don’t give any signs of life concerning our whereabouts and experiences. Perhaps our paths will diverge to such an extent in the infinite passageways of the brain that we will never encounter each other again. But this will not be true because even within the world of the heads of human beings made distant by consciousness it will come and collide with us. Thus, we pioneers of the new existence must give signs of life to each other because we are pulling the sweep net in order to catch new ones for the new existence. The unity that unites us is within us. The relationship of this unity to each one of us, its nature, and our

conscious relationship to it and towards each other is very important, as this unity should close the horizon—yes, we must close the horizon, to produce the shore onto which we can haul up the new existence. I feel that now is the time that out of the infinite movements of our egos we must come together on the edge of the horizon in order to put into place the new existence of the universe of our perfection. Our hearing must be keen enough to hear the whispers of the new existence in ourselves—we must not miss a single movement or whisper of the perfection that is within us. Let us be attentive and pensive as a new order of consent is approaching. Observe how entire columns and dust clouds of egos are moving. Look at how they move and observe that there is a veritable war and fear among them in a battle for their own egos. Do you see a mysterious hand squeezing the atmosphere? Nobody sees it but it can be felt. Do you see the new infinity, which will become the new universe? If so, cast a keen glance because something remarkable will happen. I can already see it: a line has flashed by and millions of hands have grasped it—the hands of millions of egos of personal individualism; now see how everything has risen up and become established as the perfection of squares, further, see how the square has been covered with faceted plants without a single crooked or



MALEVICH, ALEKSEI MORGUNOV, AND IVAN KLJUN
MOSCOW, ca. 1913
State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg

dented line; what is it that grows and moves the structure, what is the individualistic ego subject to? The new existence has entered the fifth dimension, and personal individualism has been confronted by the line of economy that has transformed all egos into Collective Individualism; it is now clear that economy is the way to the perfection of everything and everybody; it is now also clear that all will obtain existence only when they travel along this path of perfection: it always was, is and will be; but it must be revealed, seen and also be seen as moving towards that great perfection—victory over time. Now I understand the meaning of Suprematism; now I understand its line; now I understand our correlation to it; now I see how wizened the old world is; and now I see two moving egos in whose faces I've learned to read the signs, and I divide them into perfections, for I enter through the gates of the World; I have seen the concordance of millions of elements that form the instruments of infinite overcoming.

And so my dear friends, I haven't invented anything, but I have seen—there is so much in the moistness of our brain. I have seen the line of economy and established it as the fifth dimension of our perfection,⁵ our path and our unity lie only in and through it. As you are my friends, I will now look for it in yourselves. I now want to see you in your essence and I want you all to ponder my words, as they are the sounds made by one who is disappearing in the distance so that your echo may be heard.

About my present situation. You were astounded that I left Moscow, but it was not I who left—something carried me off—something inside of me. I was bedridden, my hand and my leg weren't functioning. As I was vigorous, I struggled for a long time; everything went back to normal and I was taken to Vitebsk.⁶ This was necessary for my essence. It had to preserve me because there is much that has to come out of me, and now it has placed me behind a desk and I am working—I write as much as I can. I still can't walk—there is a great deal of pain in my side, but my hand and leg are stronger now. I have written 55 pages about movement and

economy and a book on individualism and the ego and the collective.⁷ I lectured a great deal, took part in debates, restored the New Art, as a result of which the workers appeared with Suprematist banners; there was a gathering of the trade union councils of factories and plants, which was decorated in Suprematist style. All the buildings of the plant were decorated in Suprematist style and in the end the Red Army men also joined in by hanging a Suprematist curtain in their huge theater. We are now putting together an album of photographs to send as a consolation to the Fine [Arts] reaction in Moscow.⁸

Now we are organizing in Vitebsk a Youth Art Rally and commemorating the anniversary of the School. My friends and I will also participate. We will send you the book in the next few days. There have been delays with the cover.⁹

The book consists of one of my lectures, written down just as I spoke and published.

I'd like to see you very much and share my thoughts with you. There is much that I want to tell you and would like to accomplish. But how can I do it? I must travel sitting down, and cannot stand for a long time. I wish that I could turn into a book and wind up in Olga Konstantinovna's warehouse.¹⁰

Read the letter in your own circle, without any "outsiders" (no matter how nice they may seem) present, however, you may tell them about the victory of Suprematism.

Now I embrace all of you,

Yours, K. Malevich

Regards to Pavel Nikolaevich

You write that you would like me to send you something that I'm writing about. It would be good for me to come and read it, but it's unfeasible now. The only way would be to have me invited through the Government Academy to present a lecture. But the roads are horrible. Economy forms the basis of my ideas about everything, the World and the movement, its instruments, etc.

Note (I.V.)

In October of 1919 Malevich moved from famine-stricken Moscow, where he lived in an unheated

wooden house with his pregnant wife, to Vitebsk where there was no shortage of food. Vitebsk became Malevich's arena for spreading Suprematism as an artistic current and philosophical movement. Malevich took part in the intensive artistic life of the city, taught and organized the "party" Unovis (the Affirmers of the New Art) and wrote philosophical and theoretical works, which at first led to somewhat of an estrangement between his former friends and comrades in arms. This letter, sent to M. V. Matiushin after his move to Vitebsk, is the first detailed exposition by Malevich of the ideas that concerned him the most.

1. M. V. Matiushin lived in Petrograd on 10 Pesochnaya Street with his wife O. K. Gromozova; his home was the center of gravity for his students and comrades in arms. Filonov also lived on this street at the time. Malevich planned to move in nearby, and in 1918, he took a room at 33 Pesochnaya Street, apt. 5.

2. In 1918, the Academy of Arts in Petrograd became the State Free Higher Art Educational Workshops and Malevich was made head of a workshop. Since he permanently lived in Moscow, he would frequently ask Matiushin to substitute for him during his absences. Soon after, Matiushin became the permanent head of the workshop, and Malevich visited frequently, remaining interested in its work.

3. Malevich was influenced by M. O. Gershenzon's book *The Threefold Image of Perfection* (1918), and incorporated "perfection" into his basic concepts.

4. From 1913 to 1916 Matiushin regularly received letters from Malevich, who shared his creative plans and theoretical ideas. In 1917–19, the frequency of the correspondence dwindled considerably. The close contacts between Malevich and Matiushin were renewed after Malevich moved to Petrograd in the summer of 1922.

5. See "Statute A of Art," written November 15, 1919. Its first thesis announced: "The fifth (economy) dimension is being established" (K. Malevich. "O novykh sistemakh v iskusstve. Statika i skorost' Ustanovleniye A." Vitebsk, 1919.)

6. L. M. Lissitzky took Malevich to Vitebsk.

7 The treatise "On the ego and the collective," first appeared in the *Almanac Unovis No. 1*, issued in May 1920 in Vitebsk with a print run of five copies

8 Malevich called "the reaction" the change in the leadership of the Department of Fine Arts (IZO) of the Commissariat for the People's Education (Narkompros). In April 1919, Tatlin, who was the head of the Moscow division of IZO, was replaced by D. P. Shterenberg and O. M. Brik. Later Malevich would write: "Tatlin . . . , after becoming the head of IZO, surrendered to the right . . ." (Letter to Lissitzky, June 17, 1924, in *Pisma Kazimira Malevicha El Lissitzkomu I Nikolaiu Puninu. M.*, 2000, s. b. Published by A. Shatskikh.)

9 A reference to the "Bulletin of the Executive Committee "

2. Bulletin of the Executive Committee of Moscow State Art Workshops, No. 1, October 3

May the downfall of the old world of the arts be etched on the palms of your hands.

Long live the creation of the new and down with painterly culture—an unnecessary aesthetic sauce. All the efforts of painting were directed towards the creation of a new form of structure. Architecture and sculpture have suffocated beneath the coffin of classicism. The path of painting when it has become extinguished as such is clear. Through the nonobjectivism of the color plans of Suprematism to a new Suprematist construction of the objective world. The youth of the world has arrived.

Now we can see how the creative form moved under the yoke of deformed meaning of past ages. We have before us the exhibition of the new art, these are not aesthetic glossy canvases but the path of painting, of movement, of light towards the objective world. Observe the movement of the new as you would the processing of ore or cotton at factories and plants. Here is the ore, but here is the brass, the smelting pit, the form, and the object

Today the painter has pointed to the new form. From now on the painter no longer works in the tail end of events, he doesn't record in little sketches the drama of forces, the artist is as dead as a tattooed Papuan. The inventor of form appears as the ruler of the world. There are no arts as the inventions are beautifully logical; they need not be embellished nor beautifully described, nothing will change as a result of descriptions and no art will change the world. It will be changed by the almighty economic being. And so, create by the plumb of economy, this is the eternal revolutionary plumb of the inventor. Hence, the question and the answer.

Time; construct canvases; from the direction of these canvases shall take flight plans for new constructions. How queer the still lifes of images on the walls of the new world of constructions. Imagine Shishkin's landscapes on the walls of a zeppelin or Cézanne's pears. Imagine painterly culture on submarines. From whose canvases shall fly the plans for the new constructions?

The innovators of the "economic-grub blessings" of rights and human freedom have arrived at the communist form of crèches, freeing up youth from prejudices and oppression; creative forces are liberated; from this it is clear that it must be new; there is no creativity when the fossilized obelisk is erected on the square. We should not resemble our fathers. Their faces, palaces, and temples may be splendid a thousand times over but our new meaning will not inhabit them. We will build our own, our new world and thus will not wear the forms of Greece and Rome; we shall not be peddlers of antiques.

The innovators of the economic conditions of life carried the banners of the red revolution, and killing the "venerable old men" liberated youth. Kill the "venerable old men" of classicism and erect the new world. Keen-ones, set up the headquarters of new structures and set up the new world without delay lest Venuses rise up from the dead on narrow lifeless streets as shall rise up Pompeian backyards, and the young shoots will suffocate.

The banner of the red Unovis has been raised and it awaits you; let us create a worldwide army of

the new arts and we will overthrow the obelisks—there is no place for them on the red [beautiful] squares.

Our schools for the new currents, for in them is our youth, we are not learning to ride in Roman chariots as we have young aeroplanes and motor cars. We are not learning to sail on the ships of the old Saracens. We have submarines. We do not dispatch fast horses with parchment letters to another country, as radio towers talk with the world.

And so we are studying the new turn of events, we are following the new turn of events and Rosta informs us of the movements of the red every day and hour and we care not about Napoleon's campaigns. We shall have a Rosta of the arts, of its movements and events and let this first newspaper be the Rosta of the arts.

However, what we, the innovators of the arts say is incomprehensible to the dwarves of the objective "old man" of the old world of pastorals and lovers of complex Verocchio. They carry their old world under the red shield and want the young world to be the guardians of the open mothers of God of Kazan and Suzdal. Oh Kiev-Cave Monastery! Oh revered, saintly protectors of the arts. The *rizas* of the old sense have been torn from you and naked you are, covered in the new sense. The faces of the saints of the Moscow Cave monasteries have been revealed by approval of the Narkompros. Idlers. The priests of the dead alley of the arts are farsighted. That eccentric Tatlin wants to get money for inventing a utilitarian monument, without discovering the new sense (see new sense of the Kazan mothers—journal of the artistic life of the dead alley)

Comrades, rid yourselves of your prejudices, open the doors and come out and say: the cemetery to the old and life to the new. Set up red Unovises of the arts. Enough of obelisk tombstones on the beautiful live squares of the commune; their form is for inscriptions of funeral parlors but not for the words of the constitution of the new life

Long live red art on the new squares,
K. Malevich

Notes (V.R.)

Malevich's article reads like a manifesto of Red Unovis. The appearance of such an article in a student magazine might seem strange (as might its intonation and vocabulary). Yet it is logical in the general context of the art scene in 1920, which changed swiftly and was full of conflicts. There was a struggle of the traditionalists against the aesthetics and heroes of the new art. There was a schism in the ranks of the proponents of new art over aesthetic-ethical and sociophilosophical disagreements.

The head of the magazine was Sergei Senkin, a student of Malevich's studio in the 1918–19 school year in the Second Free Art Studios in Moscow. As secretary of the All-Russian Central Committee of Students at the Fine Arts Department of the People's Commissariat of Education, he had great influence in VKhUTEMAS, newly created by combining the First and Second Free Studios.

Senkin wrote a letter to the Vitebsk Unovis proclaiming "everything is in the hands of the apprentices, whose efforts will publish the magazine . . . send all the material you have" (typescript, private archive).

Malevich and Lissitzky, who had moved to Moscow from Vitebsk, planned to create a division of Unovis in the capital. Experimental work was being done in Vitebsk. Malevich wrote his tracts, in which he challenged all and sundry, including Marxism. How can the politicized Moscow Communo-Suprematists be joined with Vitebsk? Malevich called on, almost ordered, them "to establish red Unovises of arts. Enough of putting gravestone obelisks on living red squares of the commune." The revolutionary demagoguery sounded like a poetic text. The echoes of intramural artistic struggles sound like social demagoguery. Malevich was being sarcastic about the heroic efforts to preserve moments of the past—the Civil War was threatening to destroy them. The journal *Khudozhestvennaia zhizn* (*Art Life*), which published articles about ancient Russian art and did not publish Malevich, was also an object of ridicule, especially since the editorial offices were in an appropriately named

location—Mertyv [Dead] Lane. The endless bickering with Tatlin continued almost by inertia. He was just completing work on a model of his Tower—a utilitarian monument according to Malevich to the Third International.

David Shterenberg, head of the Fine Arts Department, was horrified. The magazine was going to be burned. But a few copies survived; some had been sent to St. Petersburg, and others were in the hands of those who put together the magazine. Let us note that this was the only experience of a joint statement by Suprematists and Obmokhu (the magazine had texts by Zh. Medunetsky, A. Naumov, and N. Prusakov). That same year, 1920, Obmokhu launched its own publication, *October Cubed*.

Malevich thought it was because of his article, but he was only partly right. Shterenberg was no admirer of Tatlin's Tower. He wasn't concerned by the attacks on *Art Life* and museum figures. The arrows were aimed at I. Grabar, who had initiated many of the unique restoration projects of those years. What had frightened Shterenberg was Senkin's article "Why We Are for the Organization of a Party." By then, there could be only one party—the Bolshevik Party. Malevich gave his opinion on the issue in January 1921 in the Vitebsk publication, *Path of Unovis* in the article, "About a Party in Art."

But probably the very fact Malevich's text was published in a seditious magazine was used by his opponents in the behind-the-scenes struggle in VKhUTEMAS. In the end, Malevich was never asked to teach there, and the idea of a Red Unovis turned out to be unviable. The era of the civil war, with its laconic poster style—Malevich refers to the ROST Windows—was becoming dated.

3. Letter from Malevich to David Shterenberg, February 16, 1921, Vitebsk

Dear David Petrovich,
I have heard rumors to the effect that you are organizing an exhibition abroad,¹ but up to now I have not received anything official or otherwise regarding this. According to what is being said,

the exhibition will be put together in late April. Naturally I've never offered myself to anyone and for that reason the attitude towards myself by the organizers of the exhibition isn't particularly good this time as well, but one thing is clear to me and that is that all of you have begun a fight against me, the first action on your part was that Kandinsky and company locked my *Square* in the Schlüsselberg fortress² and up to now it has not been allowed to see the light of day. Everything will also be arranged this time regarding the exhibition abroad. Therefore, if you have all decided to send me to the exhibition, my ideological as well as moral conditions are to send four of my works, if of course, everybody will be represented by four; if by three, then my three; if by two, then by my two, in any case do not send more than four.

If four, I ask to exhibit: 1) *Black Square*, 2) *Black Circle*, 3) *Four Cross-like Planes* and 4) *White Square*.³ Kreiter has all these works from the exhibition still,⁴ which is why I cannot bring them, after all, I can't come from Vitebsk.

If it is three, then the *Black Square*, the *Black Circle* and the *White Square*. If it is two—the black and white squares. In the catalogue, if there will be no articles, manifestos, etc., call it *Suprematism, 1913. Russia*.

I think that you, like the others, have power, this time you will not want to circumvent me, but if you want to send other things, it will be impossible for me to participate and having High Principles in art, I ask you too to have High Principles in regard to myself.

If groups will take part in the exhibition, then Unovis will have to be fully represented,⁵ and since it hasn't received any official papers, it is clear that this is being done for ideological reasons. I'd like to warn you that [such] attitudes and underhanded dealings never come to a good end, on the contrary those who strive, under different pretexts to stifle principles always lose, this has been proven historically.

You David Petrovich are in charge, so I would urge you to be responsible before history as a statesman. This is why I am writing to you, because you have power, I have ideas without power, and this is why you must do as I ask in this note.

Thank you for the food parcel, my wife has begun to spit blood.⁶

Thank you also that you permit all sorts of amateur high school students in all of the IZO departments to put spokes into the wheels of our new art and methods instead of strengthening them. Fridlender and sundry Romms⁷ are like that.

A friendly handshake,

K. Malevich

Notes (I.V.)

1 Malevich speaks of the *First Russian Art Exhibition* in Berlin, which opened in October 1922. He found out about the preparations being made from a letter by Lissitzky dated January 22, 1921. "A commission has been organized here (the instigators are Shterenberg et al.), which is to organize in conjunction with the Commissariat of Foreign Affairs and Vneshtorg, a Russian exhibition abroad. The West is terribly interested in the Russian revolutionary artistic movement, but judges it only by Kandinsky." (*V krughe Malevicha*, St. Petersburg, 2000, p. 55)

2. The Schlüsselberg fortress in St. Petersburg was used for the solitary confinement of political criminals.

Vassily Kandinsky was the chairman of the Museum (or purchasing) Commission at the Museum Bureau which was organized in May 1919 in lieu of the First Purchasing Commission, of which Tatlin, Malevich, and Pavel Kuznetsov were mem-



NIKOLAI SUETIN, KAZIMIR MALEVICH, AND LIA TSCHASCHNIK
IN MALEVICH'S STUDY AT THE MUSEUM FOR ARTISTIC CULTURE,
PETROGRAD, 1923

State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg

bers. Kandinsky was also the first head of the Moscow Museum of Painterly Culture. The *Black Square*, 1915 (now in the State Tretyakov Gallery), was placed in the MZhK by the Kandinsky commission. However, at a meeting of the commission that consisted of Kandinsky, A. Drevin, and R. Falk, a resolution was passed "to place two works by comrade Malevich (*Black Square* and *Red Square*) in the cabinet of experimental technique, MZhK" (RGALI, f. 665, op. 1 ed. Khr. 6, l. 19)

3. *Black Square* (Tretyakov Gallery), *Black Circle* (evidently lost), and *Black Cross* (Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris), were most likely exhibited together at the *O.10* exhibition in 1915, and made up a series, later reproduced as lithographs in *Suprematism: 34 Drawings*. The *White Square* is dated 1918 (Museum of Modern Art, New York). At the exhibition in Berlin three *Suprematisms* of Malevich were exhibited, but the request in the letter was not honored.

4. Ivan Kondratievich Kraitor (1881–1957), an artist and restorer, worked for the Exhibition Bureau of the IZO (Department of Fine Arts), which organized a solo exhibition of Malevich's work in May 1920. In early 1921 he became the head of exhibitions. He emigrated in 1923.

5. Not mentioned in the Berlin exhibition catalogue of the Unovis, but the works 195–222 and 479–81 in the exhibition were placed under the rubric "Vitebsk School" without indicating the names of the artists. Among the listed participants of the exhibition are Iudin (nos. 74–75), Kagan (no. 78), and Yermolaieva (no. 320), their membership in Unovis is not mentioned.

6. Lissitzky, who was living in Moscow in 1921, arranged for the food parcel. (See *Pisma Lissitzkogo Malevichu I Ettingeru*. *Sostavlenie*. Preparation of text and Notes by Aleksandra Shatskikh—*V krughe Malevicha*, pp. 52–57.)

7. When The Vitebsk artist Maks Fridlender, was in Moscow in December 1920 as a delegate of the First All-Russian Conference of Responsible Workers of the provincial sections of the IZO complained to Shterenberg about the shoddy work of the Vitebsk school. He proposed to provide food parcels for several artists—Romm, Fridlender,

Malin, Iudovin, and others. Malevich was not included in this list. (See Aleksandra Shatskikh, *Vitebsk Zhizn iskusstva 1917–1922*, Moscow, 2001, p. 163) Malevich found out about this in a letter from Lissitzky dated December 21, 1920. "Fridlender was sent from Vitebsk. At the conference he gossiped and made insinuations about our workshops. Then he made some provocative statements privately to Shterenberg. I don't have precise information but it was more or less that we teach only Suprematism; that the workshops are falling apart, the work is shoddy, etc. (*V krughe Malevicha*, p. 53)

Aleksandr Georgievich Romm (1887–1952), art historian, specialist in modern Russian and French art, author of books on Matisse and Rodin, friend of Chagall. In 1921 he was the head of the section of IZO in charge of the management of culture in the provinces. He was critical of Malevich's work and system of teaching.

4. Letter to Malevich from Kestner Gesellschaft, Hanover, December 30, 1924¹

Dear Professor Malevich,
Leningrad, Pochtamtinskaya Street, 9

On the basis of an initiative by El Lissitzky, we would like to ask you if it would be possible to organize an exhibition of your works as well as the works of the laboratories of the Institute of Contemporary Arts Culture. This exhibition could then travel to other cities in Germany such as Hamburg, Berlin, Braunschweig, etc. The most convenient dates for us would be March or April of 1925. Please let us know as soon as possible if it would be possible to organize such an exhibition, and how we could receive it.

Respectfully yours,
Krenz

Notes (I.V.)

1 The Kestner Gesellschaft—a private art company founded in 1916 by museum and art personalities of Hanover. It had a building at its disposal, which belonged to the head of the organization, P. E. Kuppers, and his wife Sophie. After her

husband's death in 1922, Sophie Kuppers conducted an independent exhibition policy, showing the works of such artists as Paul Klee, Karl Schwitters, Piet Mondrian and others. In 1922 she became acquainted with El Lissitzky and organized an exhibition of his works. The letter from the Kestner Gesellschaft was inspired by Lissitzky.

5. Letter from Malevich to the Head of the Main Administration of Scientific Institutions of the Academic Center, March 7, 1925

To Comrade Petrov,

During seven years of revolutionary activity many of my comrades have had the opportunity of going abroad to show their works and also become acquainted with the art of Western artists and increase their knowledge. In view of this fact I consider it appropriate to now raise the question of your assistance regarding my going abroad (to Germany) to organize an exhibition.

I have worked for five years at the Narkompros (People's Commissariat of Education) as a professor in the higher art schools. At present I am working on the establishment of a scientific research institute in the area of the science of art and have at my disposal a considerable number of works—painterly artistic, as well as the laboratory works of the institute. I can assume that such an exhibition would be the first of its kind in the West: not only my works will be exhibited but also those from the research laboratory. The success of this exhibition will be vouched for by the representatives of German art who have come here, and this can also be seen from the attached letter of invitation from the German firm. However, not wishing to be exploited by the firm I am appealing for your help in having the Committee for the Organization of Foreign Tours and Exhibitions abroad to issue the necessary funds for the trip and the organization of the exhibition in the West.

I take it upon myself to return this money out of the proceeds of the exhibition.

Moreover, it is imperative that I go abroad to obtain materials and information about Western

art, which will further advance the work of the Institute of Artistic Culture, the first institution of its kind in the world, which will be established on Soviet territory.

Leningrad, Institute of Artistic Culture

Notes (I.V./T.M.)

Instructions on the document: *Submit for decision of the Artistic Department. Report to Anatoly Vasilievich (Lunacharsky), F. Petrov, S. A. V. Discussed 4/20/25.*

Below: Before allowing K. S. Malevich to go on a tour abroad, I think it would be necessary to organize, in Moscow or Leningrad an exhibition of his works and the achievements of the Institute of Artistic Culture, which will travel abroad. 4/8/25, P. Novitsky

Below: Inform Malevich 4/9/25, P. Novitsky

Below (in a different handwriting): Comrade Malevich has been *informed*

A letter repeating the text of these instructions dated April 14, 1925, signed by F. N. Petrov and P. I. Novitsky was sent to the Leningrad section of Glavnauka and to Ginkhuk (Institute of Artistic Culture) to Malevich.

On March 16, Malevich sent an analogous letter to M. P. Kristi, in which he asks him to intercede to promote the organization of the exhibition abroad of the works of the research departments of Ginkhuk: Material culture (Head: B. E. Tatlin); Formal-Theoretical (Head: K. S. Malevich); Organic Culture (Head: M. V. Matiushin); Experimental (Head: P. A. Mansurov). In the letter Malevich refers to the interest shown in the institute by Western experts and commits himself to reimburse the state for the funds advanced for organizing the exhibition.

6. Petition from Malevich to Glavnauka Requestion Permission to Travel Abroad, ca. December 9, 1925¹

To: Glavnauka Artistic Department

Copy: Leningrad Division of Glavnauka

Director of the State Institute of Artistic Culture

K. S. Malevich

Request for Travel Abroad

First Proposal. It seems to me that the wave of our painting and artistic-industrial exhibitions in the West is over—all of the works in this area have been shown and the masters of the RSFSR and their achievements have been presented.² Now we must prepare for a new wave of new exhibitions, which would also show different work in the same artistic area namely the artistic, research, and scientific work. We should show what has not yet been achieved in the West in the area of aesthetics, which is of great interest there now. It is of great importance that we posit the scientific-artistic problem, as this will point to the trajectory of our development.

I think that the first scientific and scientific-artistic exhibition organized in Moscow by Glavnauka should have as one of its goals the first review of the suitability of the organization of this type of exhibition abroad.³ It could be the best indicator of all of our activities. The Institute of Artistic Culture is now beginning to feel its force and strength to such an extent regarding the questions it posited on the analysis of painterly, organic culture, that it can show its work to the West and for the first time draw attention to many questions in Artistic Culture.

The Institute of Artistic Culture is convinced of this and turns to the Main Administration of Scientific Institutions with the request to have funds issued for the preparation and organization



BANQUET GIVEN BY POLISH ARTISTS IN HONOR OF KAZIMIR MALEVICH AT THE HOTEL POLONIA, WARSAW, MARCH, 1927
State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg



TADEUSZ PEIPER AND MALEVICH AT THE BAUHAUS IN DESSAU
APRIL 7, 1927
State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg

of a scientific-artistic exhibition of the Institute abroad, in Germany, France, and America.

Second Proposal. In case it proves impossible to organize an exhibition of the works of the Institute, the Institute would like to put in a request for the following staff members to travel abroad: 1) the head of the Department of Painterly Culture (Formal-Theoretical)—K. S. Malevich; 2) the head of the Department of General Methodology—N. N. Punin; 3) the Deputy Head of the Department of Material Culture—N. N. Suetin; and the research assistant of the Department of Organic Culture—B. V. Ender, all individual requests are enclosed. All of the above-mentioned staff members will travel on official business for the first time.

Third Proposal. As a last resort, if Glavnauka will find it impossible to issue funds for the organization of the exhibition or the trips of the individual heads of departments. I, as Head of the Department of Painterly Culture (Formal-Theoretical), would like to petition Glavnauka to aid me in receiving visas and credentials to facilitate my journey to France through Warsaw and Germany on foot, which I propose to begin on May 15, and reach Paris on November 1, planning to return by train on December 1.⁴

Director of the Institute
(K. Malevich)

Notes (I.K.)

1 Dated on the basis of an excerpt from the minutes of the meeting of the Board of GINKhUK December 9, 1925, during which, after a reading and approval of the request the decision was taken to send the document to Glavnauka.

2 In all likelihood Malevich has the following exhibitions in mind: *The First Russian Art Exhibition* (1922, Berlin; 1923, Amsterdam), *XIV International Art Exhibition* (1924, Venice), *International Exhibition of Decorative Arts and Art Industry* (Paris, 1925).

3. The first exhibition of the institutions of Glavnauka of the Narkompros opened in Moscow in the Historical Museum on November 29, 1925. Two departments of GINKhUK took part in it: painting and organic culture.

4. Only the second proposal received a positive response. By a decision of the Commission on Scientific Business Trips, dated March 11, 1926, Malevich received the permission for the trip, which he couldn't take at the time.

7. Request from Malevich for Business Trip Abroad, ca. 1925

Head of the Department of Painting Culture (Formal-Theoretical) K. S. Malevich

The scientific-artistic trips of the Department of Painting Culture are justified by the need to study all the circumstances of painterly currents and their changes on the spot, by the need to become familiar with all of the works and achievements of painters, and putting together of dossiers regarding Painterly Culture, etc.

In addition, the seriousness of the work of the Department requires more precise examples than the photographs on the basis of which work is now conducted. The work will take place in Berlin, in Paris and Aix, in museums, private collections, and private artist's studios.

K. Malevich

Notes (I.K.)

Dated on the basis of an excerpt from the minutes of the meeting of the Board of GINKhUK,

December 9, 1925, after a reading and approval of the request, the decision was made to send the document to Glavnauka.

8. Notes from lectures by Malevich to a study group on new Western painting, Central House of the Arts, 1929, Leningrad

April 8, 1929

Malevich—You must attain the purity of perception,² in order to differentiate them clearly. Once you learn how to differentiate them clearly like sunflower or cannabis seeds, etc., sometimes there are ancestors in the thing itself, new information appears in it, new plans, they act more strongly and force one to repaint the entire painting. Maybe one should paint on three to four canvases in case some new plans break up.

In Picasso's Cubism, there seems to be somewhat of an inner content. It seems as if his nature contemplates something inside of himself. But the *Lady with a Fan*³ carries no content within itself, there is no pressure of another principle—maybe one percent.

Cézanne applies the black in a more vigorous manner, and the black in the rear and [unintelligi-



MALEVICH WITH HIS THIRD WIFE NATALIA MANCHENKO
FEBRUARY 15, 1927
State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg

ble]. The woman with fists⁴—is this an image? A portrait of some woman?

I sense in her a power and strength that could shift the earth or have it open up beneath her.

This means that here Picasso has a sensation of strength and power and this dominates everything else.

In Braque's oeuvre there is a purely painterly sensation; in Picasso's oeuvre there is always an admixture of a mystical sensation; but for us these contents of Cubism shall not be a law. We must penetrate Cézanne and Cubism and extract from them the fundamentals of the new art. At the present time the new art is establishing an extraordinary order that did not previously exist in history: the new artist has become more flexible and works within a whole array of sensations both representational and nonobjective. The artist vibrates in many sensations and receives a massive amount of knowledge and forms. The wider the expanse in which he works, the richer will his forms be.

Russian Museum—Konchalovsky.⁵

Krimmer⁶—Has Konchalovsky passed by Cubism?

Malevich—Konchalovsky developed the right way out of Impressionism—the Impressionism of Van Gogh. Later he develops a Cézanne-like culture on a Russian basis. Like all Russian artists, he achieved the first stage of Cubism. But later, Konchalovsky could not develop on his own momentum and returned to ordinary things with frequent mistakes—in Surikov.⁷

An individual, who has not developed his base, cannot stand as the equal of a master-inventor; he constantly falls under the influence.

Such procedures were brought out by Picasso, but when the charge ended, they fell away. Konchalovsky reached the maximum in physical painting. He went to the limits of great mastery, but falling under the influence of Surikov, his works became inferior.

Switching from one sensation to another, provided one knows every one of these sensations, drives one towards the attainment of ever-newer forms.

The plan of time. *The Man in the Hat*—no matter how you sign it or paint it, stays in the year '96. But there are works, that no matter when they were painted, will be modern, a thing of today.

Go to nature, but keep your conception; take it to nature, but receive from her as well.⁸

The times are now difficult because nothing can be made out of what has already been done.

We and Repin—this was a protest, a contradiction, a contrast with everything that exists, this was a race over forms 1,000 versts long; it had to be finished quickly, and there was no time to stop on one canvas. You, looking at my works, would not even be able to tell where and with what I as a personality used to work, because I went through different systems; I ran and recorded these systems, while I delivered blows to the school and to the present.

Between you and me there is a different order than between me and Shishkin and Repin.⁹

Young people now have to get on the path that has been dug. We dug it out and now it has to be tamped down, covered with paving stones, etc.

In France young people your age are already artists. Why? Because they follow changes and turns; they join the current, the fifth stage¹⁰ is being developed, and up to now Fauvism—all turning points, and traits of Picasso.

Over there no harm comes from it, he only has a firm base. No time or energy on the searches of new forms is expended; cultivating the form itself, and inventing within it.

Braque and Gris are working in the fifth phase, but they are different.

You also shouldn't dig through already dug paths—nothing will come of it, much has already been dug and you will be effaced.

Take the *Circle*¹¹—it progresses with every year, but along a certain line.

In terms of sensation it is a painterly condition.

They claim first place and renewal, and consider that the fifth phase has been outlived, but they are [unintelligible] lagging behind

A mixture of museums, Madonnas most of all, impressions of Moscow.

In Zagoskin¹² there is a presumption of the fifth

phase—but his sensation is evangelical; an orator, like the apostle Luke, boards as in an icon or the fifth phase.

Isn't it better to make a pure fifth phase, in order to stand on it firmly, and not to introduce?

Like Kochalovsky—he is strong only because he is whole—he stands on the path of Cézanne, the analysis of the additional element is a terrible theory, which leaves nothing of the individual, as an analysis of the audacious and hollow, and Braque and Picasso haven't spent that which they have brought.

Thus, it is better to stand on a certain path, without attempting to invent something ingenious.

In my work, what is left that is purely mine is Suprematism; the rest is not mine. But I lost nothing by going through these systems in a strict manner.

And now a school must be created, a school for young people that would proceed along a certain path. Now is a time rich with diverse changes that must be passed through instead of rushing about. That is, rushing about in one system—I would encourage Picasso and Braque—Picasso lost nothing by having in mind Braque—they developed one and the same system—as in the renaissance. What did they discover that was new in form? Nothing. The ancients invented form and the renaissance transferred it into the painterly milieu; and we are now on the verge of the same.

I would like to move ahead, but it's impossible because one must work and perfect. It's important to do and you push forward more quickly in an organized way.

For this reason I must look at your paintings and transfer them into a definite system. One can stand aside, but this would be a waste of time.

It is necessary that when the young people reach my age they should attain mastery.

I don't want to turn anyone into a Cubist or Futurist—in that case I would spend time on one system, and in one year I would drag you through each system.

In the Institute—six persons.

Present: Nelius, Krimmer, Vikhrev, Yakovlev, Sterligaov, and Leporskaia.¹³

On raising the question of monumentality in our time

Its source is easel painting

To drag everything that a painter does to the wall is senseless.

Now a painter has to study all isms.

Architects are demanding the transfer of the newest currents to coordinate with the new architecture.

It is essential to reestablish monumental painting.

1. Learn all the isms.

2. Learn the theory of additional elements—their influence on the painter.

At the present time all forms of art are disconnected in our country

They are already uniting in the west.

Disunity is fatal for artists.

Sculpture is perishing now in our country, and only when it unites with architecture can it be restored.

Painting as well.

Notes (I.L.)

1. Publication and commentary by I. V. Lebedeva. Private archive. Typewritten documents. Notes of lectures made in 1929, apparently during a session of the study group on new Western painting conducted by Malevich. The studies took place at the Central House of the Arts in Leningrad

2. Malevich wrote on numerous occasions on the role of sensation for nonobjective artists: "From the point of view of the Suprematist, the phenomena of the objective world as such have no meaning, what is essential, is only feeling as such, completely independent of the milieu from which it springs forth. The Philosophy of Suprematism dares to believe that Art, hitherto in the service of the ideas of the state and religion, can build a world of Art as a world of sensations—the nonobjectivity of Art is the art of pure sensations." (From a book by Malevich written in 1927 in Berlin. Quoted on the basis of *Kazimir Malevich. Sobranie sochinenii v 5 tomakh*, vol. 2, Moscow, 1998, pp. 103, 106–07.)

3. A reference to Picasso's painting *Woman with*



KAZIMIR MALEVICH 1927–28
State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg

Fan (1908). Previously in the collection of S. I. Shchukin, later in the Museum of New Western Art.

4. A reference to Picasso's painting *The Farm Woman* (1908). Previously in the collection of S. I. Shchukin, later in the Museum of New Western Art.

5. A reference to the works of P. P. Konchalovsky (1876–1956), whose work was exhibited at the Russian Museum.

6. Eduard Mikhailovich Krimmer (1900–1974), graphic artist, painter, theater and cinema set and costume designer.

7. Vassili Ivanovich Surikov (1848–1916), Russian realist painter

8. Drawing in lower part of text. Inscription to the right, reads: *Emerald with whitewash. Yellow zinc.*

9. Ivan Ivanovich Shishkin (1832–1898) and Iliia Efimovich Repin (1844–1930), realist painters, whose artistic style was seen by the art establishment as a model for emulation as opposed to the work of the nonobjective artists.

10. In his writings, including articles published between 1928 and 1930, in the journal *Novaia generatsiia*, Malevich stated his ideas as follows: "For example, Cubism already has five types of forms of nonobjective painterly outlook ... in Suprematism there exists an element that has a different name depending on the circumstances (nos. 5, 6). For example formative—immutable,

additional or deforming. The objective immutable formative element acquires a great significance in the collective development of the Suprematist form. Several individuals can work on this form; those who can express their heightened sensitivity to the latter, and create that heterogeneity of form that is inherent in a distinct individuality, at the same time not violating the Suprematist style" (Quoted from *Kazimir Malevich. Sobranie sochinenii v 5 tomakh*, vol. 2, Moscow, 1998, p. 131)

11. "Circle of Artists" (1926–32), association of Leningrad artists

12. David Yefimovich Zagoskin (1900–1942), Member of "Circle of Artists."

13. Evidently, the studies took place at the State Institute of the History of the Arts. Karina Ivanovna Nelius was a costume and set designer, Vikhrevva was an artist, Anna Aleksandrovna Leporskaya (1900–1982) was a painter and porcelain artist, Vladimir Vasilievich Sterligov (1904–1973) was a painter, and graphic artist, Yalovlev was unidentified.

9. Letter from Malevich to Aleksandr S. Nikolsky, n.d.

The project is to create workshops for the study of the achievements of the latest artistic culture in the area of painting and architecture and also their practical realization.

The development of the latest forms in the artistic culture of painting and architecture has entered the stage of development at which the practical development of the problem of the shaping of reality should arise.

It is now impossible to deny that the painterly culture of the latest formation has had an enormous influence on the shaping of our new reality. All types of art, including architecture, are under the influence of the latest painting. Our new reality is now faced with the problem of a new architectural paradigm. For this it is necessary to think of the timely organization of experimental practical workshops, in which the problems brought forward by the new currents, would not only

receive scientific form but practical application.

For this reason organizational design workshops are indispensable. Such new workshops are the consequences of all the theoretical-experimental works of the Committee for the Study of the Latest Modern Art.

Such workshops must have several divisions: two basic workshop divisions—*architecture* and *painting* with a joint *preparatory division*.

The basic divisions are divided into many technical cabinets on *architecture* and *painting*.

The painting department:

Cabinets: practical studies of the latest painterly arts textures, forms, experimental and practical and technology of materials.

In the practical subdivisions or study cabinets the work is conducted close conjunction with the theoretical research division of the Committee for the Study of Modern Art.

The goal of the workshops is to train highly qualified craftsmen and artists.

K. Malevich

Notes (A.P.)

Aleksandr Sergeevich Nikolsky (1884–1953), Leningrad architect. He was associated with Malevich through their joint architectural constructions in Gill (State Institute of the Fine Arts). Prior to that, in 1926, shortly before Ginukh was closed down, there were plans to replace the director of the institute, and one of the candidates for the position held by Malevich was Nikolsky. After the merger of Ginukh and Gill, Nikolsky headed the Committee of modern artistic industry, in which Malevich's students B. Ender, I. Chashnik, V. Vorobiev and L. Khidekel worked.

10. Letter from Malevich to Aleksandr S. Nikolsky, ca. 1930

Dear Aleksandr Sergeevich,

Much time has passed since the two groups representing Suprematism and the new architecture met. The "reaction in life" is rearing its head more and more. I can foresee that after the destruction of the painterly front of the new art, whose rep-

resentatives will be driven underground, a time will come when the representatives of the old forms will also lead the attack on the new forms of architecture. The expansion and unification of all the sympathizers of the new architecture must be the slogan of the day for the conquest and implementation of the new forms. I believe that you and your colleagues are coming closer to our position and I think that you will not deny that we Suprematists provide a form that does not contradict the sensations of yourself and the entire group that shares your point of view.

I believe that as soon as you will review the entire line of development of Suprematist architecture, you will arrive at the same conclusion that I have after reviewing all of the Suprematism-like Western architecture, namely that Suprematist *architekton* with its architectural sense is on a higher level than Western architecture.

You will see that the "flatlike appearance" of Western architecture is only the result of the influence of "Suprematism-like" painting. There is still a great deal of distance from the sensation of the painterly to the sensation of the three-dimensional architectural massive. Western architects haven't so far noticed what I told architects in Berlin, while Polish architects have undertaken the study of architecture from this perspective. I won't hide the fact that there is a Western imprint on your models as well.

Recognizing the importance and significance of the architectural movement, which in the West has reached enormous proportions, manifesting itself in the creation of an entire team for the development of one motif, I feel that it would be necessary to create such a team in the USSR.

However, under the conditions of the development of the Suprematist architectural front against the Constructivist front, which "swims in the clear water" of the speculative functionality of a building's construction, and which is already making sorties through the functionalism of life to form. (See the reference about Kaz. Malevich.) You cannot deny that our nineteenth century is a century of a lack of form and only with the appearance of the new art did we notice the rais-

ing of the question of form. The dictatorship of speculation is increased by speculative functions.

The constructivists fully supported this business and Gan for the first time in a reference to me began to speak of form. In this way we can notice (the indications) of some sort of ideological rapprochement. But so far only words have been spoken, but we already have form that has appeared not on the basis of speculative life but on the artistic basis of art.

Can they refute my idea that life is always impoverished, and we artists following the abstract path always find the form in which life is enveloped.

Thus we stand on the verge of a new classicism and the basic motif for the development of this new classical epoch must be *Architektonic Suprematism*.

Certainly, for the elaboration of this entire question, not only Suprematists, but architects as well, must be included so that a new front of architecture can be created.

Consequently, my group and I would like to propose to you and your group the development of the Suprematist architectural front by including many architects in our ranks.

K. Malevich

P. S. I remember that at our first meeting you raised the question of attribution. I believe that this question can be well resolved by a division of functions: the form and its "constriction," i.e., we will call the artistic side and the engineering, in that case the authorship of an entire building will be assigned to two authors: The authors of Suprematist formation and the authors of Suprematist design.

Secondly, if a member of the Suprematist group makes Suprematist architecture independently, without the participation of a Suprematist formation—in and of itself—the authorship will belong to the Suprematist engineer.

But if the members of Suprematism take part in its construction, then the degree of the authorship will depend on the degree of the work done. I think that these are purely material questions that can be resolved in the same degree of

co-authorship, i.e. the proportion of work done by each worker performing one task or another.

And so, if your group agrees with the basic point of the development of the Suprematist architectural front, I request that you set forth in writing your motives and requests and proposals which will lead closer to a merger. It is somehow better to lay out one's thoughts and position on paper.

11. Transcript of the OGPU (United State Political Agency) Interrogation of Malevich, September 1930

STATEMENT NO. OF INTERROGATION
CONDUCTED IN PP OGPU IN LVO

Op. Upolnomochenny. 7th Section [surname]
PO DELU ZA No.

I, the undersigned, have been interrogated as the accused [witness—crossed out] give evidence:

1. Surname: Malevich
2. First Name, patronymic Kazimir Severinovich
3. Age [the questionnaire is further not filled out, the page is crossed out]

Having been warned about the responsibility of giving false testimony, I provide the following testimony in relevance to the case:

My view on art. art must provide the newest architecture and everything connected with its entirety, reflecting the social problems of proletarian society

I am being accused of formalism by the staff of the State Institute of the Arts in the person Atsarkina and Serebriakov;¹ this is not correct as I have proven with my work and my contemporary view on art, I am striving to be closer to production: my new works on dishes are in demand for export, which provides our union with an economic benefit; at the same time there is recognition in the West of our innovation in art, with which we can show our achievements on the cultural front.

I traveled abroad on official business on behalf of Glaviskusstvo. I completely fulfilled the task with which I was charged. The exhibitions that I

organized in Germany and Poland presented a favorable impression of Soviet art. I never shared the views of the bourgeois world in art and never belonged to any right [wing] currents. When I was in Warsaw, the right [wing]—the bourgeois practitioners of art didn't even provide me with adequate space.² In Germany I was referred to as the "Bolshevik who has arrived." In Warsaw I wasn't able to contact the bloc "g" as by that time it had fallen apart. It consists of two people and the substance of their work is not connected to mine.

There were no attempts on the part of the practitioners of art of the bourgeois tendency to win me over to their side, nor could there have been, as my convictions and views on art, based on thirty years of work, are known.

From the first days of the revolution, I have been working for the benefit of Soviet art, while at the same time, during the revolution, a part of the reactionary element turned away from work. I come from a worker's family⁴ and became famous by my own efforts. I didn't study anywhere because I couldn't be accepted in any institution of learning due to the social system in tsarist Russia.⁵ I received from the Revolution everything I have strived for and now I can, with confidence, apply my knowledge to the common cause. However, due to the presence of some bureaucratic vestiges from the past, even though I have my own laboratory at the Institute, I am unable to fully develop my own production project, in spite of the fact that in the final decision of the Commission on the purging of the state apparatus⁶ the work of my laboratory was recognized as valuable and indispensable in terms of resolving the problems of the new way of life, in textiles and polygraphy, etc.; but there are, as yet, no results based on these decisions. I believe that in the majority of cases this is due to the director, Serebriakov. My usefulness in work is known to: Lunacharsky, the head of IZO CC (Central Committee), VKP(b) (All-Russian Communist Party—Bolshevik), Shutko, Kirill Ivanovich⁷; The Chairman of Cultural Ties with Foreign Countries, Petrov, Tirtadov, Artem S. (8), employee of Narkomtorg (Peoples' Commissariat of Trade) in the area of

export-import, who knows me in connection with my work in the artistic decoration of dishes. All of these persons have known me as a Soviet artist for several decades.

I cannot testify to anything more, I read the statement, and witness the testimony with my signature

K. Malevich

Interrogated by [signature]

Notes (I.V.)

In accordance with the rules governing the use of the TsA (Central Archive) of the FSB the surnames of the workers of the OGPU and witnesses connected with the case have been deleted. Case No 3730, I, 14–15 (handwriting on form). The text of the testimony is written in red ink by the interrogator (in the present publication in italics). Grammatical errors in the handwritten text have been corrected in the present publication. Malevich's handwriting is original. Malevich was arrested on September 20, 1930, by the OGPU (United State Political Agency) on the charge of "having committed a crime under article 58-6 of the Criminal Code," i.e., espionage was linked by the investigation to his trips abroad: "the present case arose on the basis of a report to the OGPU that Malevich, during his official trip to Poland in 1927, met with a group of artists hostile to the USSR. In addition, after being asked to register at the Embassy in Warsaw, delayed doing so—ostensibly because of "ill health" (Ibid., I. 19). It is typical that the case against Malevich was not launched immediately after his return but three years later. This had to do with the intensification of an ideological campaign—a great purge of the staff of Narkompros, involving firings and the "working over" of those who thought differently. Strangely enough, Malevich wasn't accused of intending to emigrate—a dangerous matter for Malevich. In his testimony Malevich avoids political subjects (even though in one of the questionnaires of the case, answering a question on his political beliefs writes "Sympathetic to Soviet Power" (Ibid., I. 11). He quite skillfully changes the topic of the conversation to "left-wingers" and

"right-wingers" identifying "practitioners of art hostile to the Soviet Union" with the representatives of "bourgeois tendencies" and proves his not belonging to the latter. A few days after his release on December 8, 1930, he wrote to his friend L. Kramarenko: The case involved the ideology of all existing currents and I as a theoretician and ideologist had to clarify... whether there were in all of the currents, "right" or left deviations, if some things weren't carried too far, etc." (Quoted from I. A. Zhmoisto, *Lev Iurievich Kramarenko, 1888–1942. Zhivipis. Grafika. Katalog Vystavki*, Moscow, 1995.)

1. Esfir Nikolaevna Atsarkina (1903–1977), art historian and author of books on Russian Romantic painters. In 1930, she was the secretary of the history of art section of GIII. From 1944, she worked in the Tretyakov Gallery.

2. Mikhail Vasilievich Serebriakov (1879–1959), Soviet public figure. A lawyer by training, he worked as a propagandist and political editor of newspapers and magazines. Beginning in 1921, he was professor at the Petrograd University. From 1927–30, he was the rector of the LGU (Leningrad State University). In April 1930 as a result of the purge of the staff of Narkompros he was appointed the director of the GIII in lieu of D. I. Shmidt.

3. Malevich's exhibition took place in a hall of the Hotel "Polonia" in which the space for hanging pictures was small and unsuitable. Photographs of the exposition show that several vertical compositions were exhibited horizontally due to lack of space.

4. Malevich puts together the names of different artistic groups: the Polish association Blok (1925–26), whose organizers V. Strzheminsky and K. Korbo founded the group Preznes in 1926, and the association of Berlin architects G (Gestaltung), whose members included H. Richter and Mies van der Rohe (as of 1923).

5. Malevich distorts the facts somewhat. His father was a highly qualified sugar-manufacturing engineer and a member of the nobility.

6. Not entirely true. There were no restrictions based on class origin in tsarist Russian institutions

of learning. The Moscow School of Painting, Sculpture and Architecture was especially liberal: Malevich attempted to gain admittance there many times but failed the exams in his field. According to Vladimir Mayakovsky's memoirs, this was the only school that did not require a reference of trustworthiness, i.e., political loyalty.

7. A commission that worked in GIII from the end of 1929 to early 1930. The *Red Gazette* of Leningrad, January 30, 1930 (evening edition), reported: "Moscow (By Telephone)."

8. An order concerning the Leningrad Institute of the History of the Arts has been published, in which it has been deemed expedient to preserve the institute "as a single institution of learning, systematically studying art from a Marxist perspective." Glavnauka and Glaviskusstvo have been charged with forming the new membership of the presidium of the institute. The new presidium will have a month to review the present personnel of the institute including the members, staff, and heads of departments." However, in that same year 1930, in connection with the purge of the staff of Narkompros the institute was reorganized and became known as the Leningrad Division of the State Academy of Art History, and its governing body was changed.

9. Kirill Ivanovich Shutko (1884–1941), professional revolutionary, from 1902, member of the RSDP (Russian Social Democratic Party). In Soviet times he worked in the area of the management of culture. Malevich became acquainted with him in 1905 and maintained friendly ties with him for many years. In 1930 he occupied a high position in which he was responsible for cultural policy in the cinema in the CC VKP (b) (Central Committee of the All-Russian Communist Party—Bolshevik). According to Malevich's daughter, U. K. Urman, Malevich was released from prison as a result of Shutko's intercession. In 1938 Shutko was arrested and died in the camps.

10. Artem Sergeevich Tirtadov, friend and fellow-countryman of K. I. Shutko, professional revolutionary. In Soviet times he worked in the food industry.

12. Letter from Malevich to N. A. Malevich, November 15, 1930, Leningrad

My dear, darling Natashenka,

I believe that you will be able to keep the family together. Keep the room. I hope that justice will triumph, and we will see each other soon. I had a second attack—this is bad. I miss you and Unochka terribly. If you don't have enough money for [unintelligible word] affairs, you should be helped. Write to the Kiev Museum to hold up my paintings until my release. If they intend to buy—then at what price?¹ My paintings are valuable—how much will they give?

I kiss you, your loving Kazik.

Dear Unochka.

Be well-behaved and good, live in friendship with everybody. Study and listen to others. I kiss you and Babushka.² Regards to Neli and Vasia³ Papa.

Natashenka you must write to Mechik not to forget Unochka, your—kiss you—loving Kazik.

Notes (I.V./T.M.)

(First publication in the newspaper *Supremus*, 1991 No. 01, p. 8)

Postcard: On the reverse side in Malevich's handwriting: K. S. Malevich, Cell 167, ODPZ Nizhegorodskaya 39.

Where: Leningrad, Soiuz-Svazi Street, Bldg. 2, Apt. 5
To whom: Natalia Andreevna Malevich

The text is written in pencil. The postcard is addressed to N. A. Malevich (née Manchenko, 1902–1990), wife of the artist. (Their marriage was registered in July of 1927.)

ODPZ—Otdelenie Dosrochnogo Predvaritelnogo Zakliuchenia (Department of Preliminary Imprisonment Before Trial)

1. Malevich's paintings and architektons remained in the Kiev Museum after his solo exhibition in 1930. The museum planned to acquire the paintings, but due to lack of funds this question could not be resolved for a long time. (See Malevich's correspondence with L. Iu. Kramarenko—ed. Lev Iurievich Kramarenko.)

2. Una (1920–1989), daughter of Malevich and Sofia Mikhailovna Rafalovich, lived at that time with

her grandmother—Maria Sergeevna Rafalovich.

3. Vasilii Raflovich (1891–1953), the brother of Sofia Mikhailovna Rafalovich, Nelli (Nionila) Gavrilovna (1893–1963) was his wife

4. Mechislav Severinovich Malevich (1882–1962), the brother of K. S. Malevich lived in Moscow.

13. Letter from Malevich to Ivan Kliun, June 2, 1931, Leningrad

Dear Ivan Vasilievich!

I think that you already had a chance to rest and wear yourself out in Moscow. As for myself, I am suffocating completely. One could say that up to now my vacation in Sochi has not gone out of my mind, and now I still have to wait in Leningrad, and I don't know when I will leave. I'm completely alone here. There's no one to talk to. Everybody is sitting like moles.

Summer has arrived, and I'm like a little bird in a cage in this damn city. I'd like to leave for Moscow, but I'm unable to. Maliarstroy, if you'll excuse the expression at this time of night, evidently wants me to work for—let us say—150 rubles.² I waited and waited and not a damn thing. I either have to grasp at something or lower the anchor.

I was asked to become a consultant for Lengiz. They offered 440 rubles. We signed the contract but I'm again stuck on the Moika. I'm completely bored out of my mind. I left a long time ago. I could now be back after June 15. It would be good if you were in Moscow. This summer I will live in Abramtsevo and the little village of Bykovo.

I'm thinking of painting portraits. For the time being I wrote a book—*Izologia*³ I'll bring the rough draft with me to Moscow. We'll read it and type two copies on your typewriter for friends as a memento, as I won't be able to publish it anyway.

Call my brother, or maybe you can find out from Mikhail Petrovich what the situation is with my sketches. The Tretyakovka took two of my sketches and wanted to buy them, but so far I don't know if they will or not.⁴ Regards to Ekaterina Konstantinovna.⁵

Your Kazimir Malevich
[On the reverse]:

Do you know, Ivan Vasilievich, that during the entire time of my vacation I had a very strong premonition of death. Somehow, I don't want to die, but every evening this idea gnaws at me. I feel it so acutely, and it's so disappointing that I've lived for a long time but haven't done much.

But I want to live, oh how I want to live. And you know, I'd like to live the remaining time more gaily. You get to thinking that in the past the times were bad but they were gay, but now the times are better but there is no gayness; but time marches on and the clock beats out the time.

The years pass by, and before you know it you've kicked the bucket. I'm getting these thoughts also because there are no people from Barvikha.

When I die, all of the artists and those who know me must bury me in Barvikha.⁶ Do you remember where we sat the last time? You can see far into the distance. The Moscow River winds its way calmly. But further from the shore so that my legs won't stick out. And place on the grave a tower in the shape of that column, which is in the Tretyakovka (perhaps in the basement)⁷ on which will be placed a telescope—"Jupiter"—to look through. And when you drop dead you can lie down next to me—I know you'll outlive me.

K. Malevich

Notes (A.S./I.V.)

1. In this allegorical form Malevich speaks of his arrest in the fall of 1930.

2. For several years Malevich attempted to move back to Moscow, and with this goal in mind negotiated with the Moscow Trust "Maliarstroy," which offered him the position of consulting artist for its design bureau.

3. In speaking of his "little book" Malevich evidently has in mind a new version of one of the chapters of a book conceived by him (*Izologia*), entitled "The Practice of Impressionism." The manuscript (in three versions) was at the disposal of N. I. Khardzhiev. The final version (67 sheets) was dated by the author October 1932. At the present time, the manuscripts are in the RGALI (closed archive).

4. In January 1931, Malevich proposed to the Tretyakov Gallery to acquire a version of his painting *The Flower Girl* (dated 1904, signed by the artist), and the painting *Two Sisters* (*Sisters*, artist dated, 1910) (See declaration in the book of art acquisitions, OR GTG, f. 8 IV/III, No. 814.) The gallery only acquired *Sisters*, *The Flower Girl* was in the collection of the Chudnovsky family, St. Petersburg. Both paintings are now dated 1930.

5. Kliun's wife, Ekaterina Konstantinovna Kliunkova.

6. Malevich wrote about this in his will, December 1, 1933. Later he amended it, as the Council of Ministers was building a sanatorium in Barvikha, and it became a restricted area.

7. *Arhitekton*, belonging to the Tretyakov Gallery, was in the repository of the museum. See article by Tatiana Mikhienko in this publication.



KAZIMIR MALEVICH, MAY 1931
State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg



KAZIMIR MALEVICH AT THE INSTITUTE OF
ARTISTIC CULTURE, 1925
State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg

CATALOGUES OF EXHIBITIONS OF
MALEVICH'S SUPREMATIST WORKS
HELD DURING HIS LIFETIME AND
THEIR REVIEWS.

1915–16

December, 19, 1915–January 19, 1916
The Last Futurist Exhibition of Paintings
"0.10" [Zero-Ten], Galerie Dobychina,
Petrograd

39. *Square*; 40. *Painterly Realism of the Football Player—Painterly Masses in the Fourth Dimension*; 41. *Painterly Realism of a Boy with a Satchel—Painterly Masses in the Fourth Dimension*; 42. I; 43. *Painterly realism of a peasant woman in two dimensions*; 44. *Self-Portrait in Two Dimensions*; 45. *Automobile and Lady—Painterly Masses in the Fourth Dimension*; 46. *Lady—Painterly Masses in the Fourth and Second Dimensions*; 47. *Painterly Realism of Painterly Masses in Two Dimensions*; 48–59. *Painterly Masses in Motion*; 60–77. *Painterly Masses in Two Dimensions in a State of Rest*.

Malevich's catalogue statement (see page 00): In naming several of the paintings I do not wish to show that forms must be sought in them. I want to point out that I regarded real forms as heaps of formless painterly masses on which a painting was created that has nothing to do with nature.

COMMENTARY

Alexandre Benois, *The Last Futurist Exhibition*, speech delivered January 1, 1916:

Mr. Malevich speaks very plainly of the disappearance of the habit of the consciousness to see images in paintings. But do you know what this is? It is nothing less than a call for the disappearance of love, that fundamental principle that provides us with warmth and without which we would inevitably freeze to death and perish. "The habit of the consciousness to see the nooks and crannies of nature"—but this is the whole of the landscape; this is everything: Dürer, Dante, Rembrandt, Impressionism, Cézanne, Turgenev, Wagner, and Fidiu. Most important, this is the sum

total of all that they loved. It is how they expressed their "cult of life," their relation to the universe. Instead of this Mr. Malevich (and he is not alone in this, but a representative of his time, his "legion") is glad that he has transformed himself in the "nothingness" of forms, that he has destroyed the ring of the horizon which "leads the piper away from his goal and to destruction." Mr. Malevich promises to bring us to the goal and to destruction, and thus he is seized with pride and aspires to some sort of divine honors.

At the exhibition we can find an illustration of this "sermon of nothingness and destruction," high in a corner just under the ceiling, in the hallowed space, there hangs a "work" without a number, undoubtedly by the same Mr. Malevich, depicting a black square framed in white. No doubt this is the "icon" which the Messrs. Futurists are proposing instead of Madonnas and shameless Venuses. This then, is the "mastery over the forms of nature" towards which, with the full force of logic, leads not only the work of the Futurists with their confused muddle and their breaking of "things," with their crafty, insensitive, rational experiments, but also all of our "new culture" with its means of destruction, and with its even more terrible means of mechanical "restora-

г.
Названия Малевич

Когда печатать привычка сознания падать в журналы и в сб.,
равнение трюнов природы, макронт и бесстыдных пестер тогда
только увидишь чисто-животное провозвеще

И преобразился во муть формы и выловить себя из олуфта
орачи Любопытство Искусства

Я уничтожил кольцо—горизонт, и вышить из крива пещей,
из кольца горизонта в котором выданы художник и форма
натуры.

Это прокатное кольцо открывал все новое и новое увидишь ху-
дожника от пыли и вьбелы.

И только трудное сознание и осознание творческой силы из
художник подается обману и устанавливаются свое искусство на
формах натуры, боясь лишиться фундамента, на котором осно-
вывалась свое искусство дикора и вьбелы

Воспроизводить обьективные предметы и уголки природы, не-
равно, что восторгаться вору на свои заковананы вон.

Только тупые и бездельные художники превращают свое
искусство вкартинство

Вь бесстыдей, вьвине истина но не истины

Вещи исцелили язык дыли, для новой культуры искусства и иску-
ство видеть из самознания—творчества, из господству надь формами
натуры.

MALEVICH'S STATEMENT IN THE BROCHURE FOR THE LAST
FUTURIST EXHIBITION OF PAINTINGS "0.10" ZERO TEN, 1915
Courtesy Vasili Rakitin

tion," with its "Americanism," and with its kingdom of the "Boor," not in the future but in the here and now. A black square in a white framework is not just a joke or a challenge, nor is it a chance episode of little importance in a house on the Field of Mars; it is an act of self-affirmation by the principle whose name is the "impertinence of desolation" which takes pride in the fact that through arrogance and a sense of self-importance and by the vilification of everything that is loving and gentle, it can lead everyone towards death and destruction.... Whence can the words of the incantation come? How to pronounce the spell which will once more bring back the cherished images of life upon the background of the black square?

Mikhail Matiushin, "On the Exhibition of the Last Futurists," *Almanakh vesennii* (St. Petersburg: Ocharovanny strannik, 1916), pp. 17–18

In welcoming every quest for the new, we are happy to recognize as such, although not fully, Malevich's "New Painterly Realism," which for some reason goes by the academic name of "Suprematism."

The idea of the independence of color in painting and revelation of the individual characteristics of each material has its history, but Malevich has strongly felt this idea in a new way. How he has coped with "the New" is another matter. On the positive side is the great value of his achievement.



THE LAST FUTURIST EXHIBITION OF PAINTINGS "0.10" (ZERO-TEN), 1915
State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg

The inconsistency of the "symbol of concealment" up to the strongly protected body and the inadequacy of the conditions for the new measure are on the negative side. The difficulty of the realization of his idea lies in the rejection of form, which has a detrimental effect on coloring. The coloring should stand above form to such a degree so as not to flow into any squares, set squares, etc. In addition to this difficulty the dynamic of the color, i.e. its movement, has to be expressed. And if not everything has been done as it should be, it is the fault of the Moscow artists who are ready to give up everything for the right to be in first place even for an instant. For the sake of this, nothing is spared. The first one to come up with the new is king! Moreover, a couple of good friends can snatch your new ideas right from under your nose. So there is simply no time to bring an idea to fruition. Even if your new idea won't ultimately succeed you can still get a lot of mileage out of it in the beginning....

In the shallowness of the introduced colorful planes one feels a break from "Cubo"; incomplete and broken where, with the full force of painterly mass, it should be confirmed simply and ingenuously. But the execution and idea are so interesting that they create a strong impression of an impending transformation in art.

Anonymous, "'Double-V' Futurist Exhibition," *Petrogradskii listok*, December 20, 1915

This exhibition does not differ in any way from last year's exhibition: the same wild smears of paint, the same cardboard and tin cylinders, cones and bricks, nailed to boards and named in the catalogue by the most unexpected names such as "Portrait of Uncle," "Street," "Synthesis of Beauty," "The Suffering of Light Blue Happiness," "Suprematism of Art," etc.

Incidentally, these are not the ravings of madmen, but rather, this is a case of clever poseurs luring in the public to get the fifty-kopek admission fee out of them.

Nikolai Punin, "A Chapter from Memoirs," *Panorama iskusstv* 12 (Moscow, 1989), pp. 180–86

In 1915 in Petersburg *The Last Futurist Exhibition "0.10"* was held—that is what it was called "*0.10*" *The Last Futurist Exhibition*.

Malevich came from Moscow with this exhibition bringing with him Suprematist squares and an entire retinue of artists: They had all gone through Suprematism and Suprematism came to tempt us.

Evidently we couldn't imagine back then quite clearly what place Suprematism would take in the new art. In Malevich himself—that magnificent agitator, advocate, and heresiarch, of the Suprematist faith, and in everything he said, there was, at that time a great deal of vague Futurism, a proclivity towards inventiveness at the cost of quality and much rationalistic ferment. We felt that Suprematism was a dead end: an emptiness concealed by the futuristic heroic deed—a void of invention outside of the material. Suprematism was the cold emptiness of rationalism vanquished by the world helplessly raising a square over it.

The arrival of Malevich and the resulting commotion involving Suprematism, was a landmark in our lives. Later, when he left, and life resumed its natural course we were no longer the same: We had experienced the Suprematist squares, behind the Suprematist squares was the negated Cubo-Futurism and before us, ever more demanding, ever more mature, sated on life and merging with it as a concrete problem of quality, stood art.

1916

November 6–December 19

Exhibition of Paintings and Sculpture by the Association of Artists "Knave of Diamonds," Salon K. Mikhailova, Moscow

140–99. *Suprematist Paintings*

COMMENTARY

A. Rostsii (A. M. Efros), "Bubnovi Valet" ("Knave of Diamonds"), *Russkie vedomosti* November 8, 1916

The Suprematists who have expelled from their paintings all figurativeness, and who have turned paintings into a combination of abstract, colored squares, circles and lines cannot consider themselves to be the "dernier cri" in this respect, certainly they are no more than the epigones of Kandinsky, whose teachings they have altered, cleaned-up and made more cerebral and cold

1917

April 23

Auction Exhibition to Benefit Recently Released Political Prisoners, Salon Edinorog, Moscow

65 *Suprematism of Color*

November 16–December 4

Exhibition of Paintings by the Association of Artists "Knave of Diamonds," Salon K. Mikhailova, Moscow

Suprematism: 129. A, 130 B; 131. V; 132 G, 133 D; 134 E, 135. ZH; 136. Z; 137. I; 138. I; 139. K, 140. L; 141 M; 142. N; 143. O; 144 P.

December 6–19

Second Exhibition of Contemporary Decorative Art "Verbovka," Salon K. Mikhailova, Moscow

128–36. *Pillow*; 137–38. *Ribbon*; 139. *Belt*, 140–43. *Bag*, 144. *Blotting Pad*

COMMENTARY

Nikolai Punin, "On the New Artistic Groups," *Iskusstvo kommuny*, February 9, 1919

Suprematism has blossomed all over Moscow in magnificent colors. There is Suprematism everywhere: on shop-signs, in exhibitions and cafes.

All of this is very revealing. One could say with confidence that the day of Suprematism is arriving and on that very day Suprematism will lose its creative importance. What was Suprematism?

Without any doubt it was a creative invention, albeit a purely painterly one. Suprematism gathered within itself all the painting of the past and thus contained within itself all of the painterly shortcomings (as well as virtues) of the past.

Suprematism extracted from the world history of art all the painting that existed in it and organized it through its elements. At the same time it abstracted this painting, depriving it of material substance and a *raison d'être*. That is why Suprematism is not *grand art*; that is why it is so easily applied to textiles, cafés, fashion drawings, and so on. Suprematism is an invention that is destined to have an enormous importance in applied art, but that is not yet art. Suprematism did not provide a form. Moreover it is "polar" in form as a principle of a new artistic era. There is no further development of Suprematism. It is a closed concener in which all paths of world art have come together in order to die there.

Vera Pestel, extract from 1916 diary:

The artist Malevich has simply painted a square and completely filled it in with pink paint; he filled in another square with black paint and then many squares and triangles with different colors. His room was beautifully decorated in a multitude of colors, and it was very pleasant to transfer one's gaze from one color to another (incomprehensible)—all of them of different geometric shapes. It was very peaceful to look at the different squares—no thoughts came to our minds nor any desires. The pink made one happy as well as the black.

We liked it. It was good to sit in such a room and not think of any objects, while the colors made the room cheerful and happy. The fulfilled geometric forms made everything colorful, pleasant, and peaceful.

We also became Suprematists (that is what he called himself).

There is no *Weltanschauung* here. No feelings, or moods. But feeling is just the sensuousness of colors. That is all.

—Excerpted from *Amazonki Avangarda* (Moscow: Nauka, 2001), pp. 241–42

1919

April 27—ca. May 31

Tenth State Exhibition: Nonobjective Art and Suprematism, Salon Rozdestvenka Street, Moscow

140–55 *Suprematism*

November 8–December 22

First State Exhibition of Paintings by Local and Moscow Painters, Club Borohov, Vitebsk

81 *Portrait of the artist Kliun*; 82 *Cow on a Violin*; 83 *Suprematism*

1920

February 6

First Exhibition (One-Day) of the Unovis Group Posnovis, Vitebsk

Without catalogue

February 15 – March 1

Second Student Exhibition of the Art School, Vitebsk

Without catalogue



SIXTEENTH STATE EXHIBITION OF VTSVB. KAZIMIR MALEVICH. HIS PATH FROM IMPRESSIONISM TO SUPREMATISM. SALLES B. DIMITROVKA, FORMERLY SALON K. MIKHAILOVA. MOSCOW. MARCH 25, 1920–?

Courtesy of Rakitin

Opened on March 25

**Sixteenth State Exhibition of VTsVB.
Kazimir Malevich: His Path from
Impressionism to Suprematism, Salles B.
Dimitrovka, formerly Salon K. Mikhailova,
Moscow**

Without catalogue

COMMENTARY

M. Lerman. Notes of a Conversation, n.d.

Attended Malevich's exhibition. A suite of rooms—Cézanneist works, Cubism, Cubo-Futurism, colored Suprematism, black-and-white Suprematism, a black square on a white background and a white square on a white background and in the last hall—empty white stretchers.

—Excerpted from: Aleksandra Shatskikh, *Vitebsk: Zhizn iskusstva 1917–1922*, Moscow: Iazyki russkoi kultury, 2001, p. 127.

V. Khodasevich, from *Portrety Slovami. Ocherki* (Portraits in words: essays)

At one of his exhibitions he (Malevich) exhibited an “almost perfect” Suprematist work. This was a square canvas, well covered with oil whitewash (approximately seventy by seventy centimeters) in a gilded frame. Subsequently he exhibited just an empty frame. In both cases there were many discussions and debates, but in both cases his intent was mockery.

A. Sidorov, “Khudozhestvenni vystavki” (“Art exhibitions”), *Tvorchestvo* (Nos. 2–4, 1920), p. 34

The first exhibition to open was dedicated to the oeuvre of Kazimir Malevich, the inventor of Suprematism, who has, for a long time, been the focal point of young “left” artists. His work is considered unintelligible by those who have not learned to attune their eyes to the Suprematist manner. The paintings at the exhibition range from the most innocent realistic–impressionist studies to works where, reaching the heights of non-objective art, two types of white textures set against a white background delineate white circles.

The artist follows a logical path. He rejects one thing in nature and then he gradually discards figurativeness itself. This is a straight and honest path. However, there are no “revolutions” here. Malevich has come to his “last word” by developing qualities that were inherent in well-known phenomena of impressionism. At the exhibition one becomes clearly aware of the fact that our “left” non-objective art—you can call it as you like—“suprematism,” “futurism,” or anything else—really is the *last word* of all of the old art.

A. Efros, “Kazimir Malevich: Retrospektivnaia vystavka” (“Kazimir Malevich: retrospective exhibition”), *Khudozhestvennaia zhizn* (No. 3, 1920)

Up to now Malevich has been a rather mysterious master. Not that we don't know him—but we perceived him, as I mentioned above, through small doses of his works, filling the gaps with large doses of his theories on art.... Now it turns out that there is no such “artist Malevich” at all; there are several persons whose name is “Kazimir Malevich” who produce paintings.... In his lack of independence, dependency and subordination he is very persistent and consistent; however, as every new “epidemic” captivates him completely, the one Malevich falls apart into several Maleviches; but these several Maleviches are unable to constitute one complete Malevich.... Only the



SIXTEENTH STATE EXHIBITION OF VTsVB KAZIMIR MALEVICH HIS PATH FROM IMPRESSIONISM TO SUPREMATISM, SALLES B DIMITROVKA, FORMERLY SALON K. MIKHAILOVA, MOSCOW, MARCH 25, 1920–7

Courtesy Vasilii Raktin

latest version of Malevich deserves our attention—Malevich the Suprematist. Here he is original, at least in terms of theory.

Malevich does not understand however, that art gains nothing from theory. As far as he is concerned, art emerges from theory. Once a dogma is created—art will adjust to it. Now he could paint with his eyes shut. He could now paint being completely blind. The brain is more important than the eye: As long as there is thought there will be painting. This is the touching fetishism of a primitive personality, who has discovered within himself the process of thought! His Suprematist experiments are the same. They are not paintings at all but illustrations of a theory. Their justification or superfluousness depends directly on the truthfulness or falsity, richness or emptiness of any of Malevich's theoretical schemes, and not at all on their intrinsic artistic merits or the successful solutions of purely painterly problems. There is nothing whatsoever that is outstanding about Malevich either as a painter, a master of texture, a master of tone or as a master of color.

June

**First Exhibition of Unovis, Svomas,
Moscow**

The Exhibition was timed to coincide with the first All-Russian conference of teachers and students of art in Moscow, June 2–9, 1920.

COMMENTARY

Quoted from *Sergei Mikhail Eizenshteyn. Memuary (Sergei Mikhail Eisenstein: Memoirs)*, Moscow, Red. gazety “Trud”: Muzei kino, 1997, v. 2, p. 307:

A strange provincial town.... The red bricks of the principle streets are painted white and on this white background numerous green circles, orange squares and blue rectangles have been painted. This is Vitebsk in 1920. Malevich's paintbrush has made its way over the brick walls of the town. “The squares are our palettes” the walls proclaim.... In a fleeting impression of the town one sees orange circles, red squares and green trapeziums.

Suprematist confetti is strewn about the streets of a flabbergasted city

October–November
Art and Revolution, Vitebsk

Without catalogue

1921

March 28
Second Exhibition of Unovis, Atelier Tramot, Vitebsk

Without catalogue

COMMENTARY

A. Romm, "Vystavka b Vitebske" ("Exhibition in Vitebsk"), *Iskusstvo (Vitebsk)* (Nos. 4–6, 1921), pp. 41–42

There were quite a few works at the Unovis exhibition. On display was the result of two years of work (1919–21). Unovis needs the new art only as a fulcrum on which to place the lever of Suprematism (the highest and ultimate apocalyptic system) in order to overturn the entire world. The leaders of Unovis will accept nothing less. Unovis has no use for art or painterly culture in and of itself as they will wither away in the process of the building of fantastic world spaces.

The conquest of space, building in the air, the radical reconstruction of all of the material–technical culture on the basis of "the laws of nature"—such are the grand utopias that draw adolescent artists to Unovis

June 4–8
Unovis Exhibition in the Paul Cézanne Club of Vkutemas, Moscow

Without catalogue

June 22–July 12
Exhibition Dedicated to the 3d Congress of the Comintern, Hotel Continental, Moscow

Without catalogue

December 20–21
Unovis, Inkhuk, Moscow

Without catalogue

COMMENTARY

B. Arvatov, [Review of K. S. Malevich's book] *Bog ne skinut: Iskusstvo, Tserkov, Fabrika (God Is Not Overthrown)* [Vitebsk, 1922], in *Pechat Revoliutsiia*, Moscow, 1922, kn. 7

There are two conflicting currents in nonobjective art, as there were before in figurative painting . . . expressionism, i.e., the art of subjective and emotional-anarchic forms stemming from Van Gogh (Kandinsky, Paul Klee, Kokoschka) and constructivism, i.e., the art of making things, stemming from Cézanne (Tatlin, Rodchenko, Stenbergi). The first current places art above life and endeavors to change life in conformance with art, while the second places life above art . . . and endeavors to make art conform to life. For the first current form is paramount, for the second it is the goal of this form.

To which of these currents does Suprematism belong?

Suprematism is nothing else than that very same expressionism, however, not emotional but intellectual. While expressionists can be characterized as fully lacking in formal principle, the Suprematists, on the other hand, strictly adhere to geometrical forms (the square is a "sacred symbol" for all Suprematists and is sown on everyone's sleeves of coats and jackets) but this is where all difference ends.

Suprematism is the most malevolent reaction under the banner of revolution, i.e., an especially harmful reaction. Left art, represented by its truly revolutionary groups (Constructivism) must pitilessly sever the links that still tie it to Suprematism.

N. Taraburkin, *Ot molbert k masine (From the Easel to the Machine)*, Moscow, 1923, p. 12

If Malevich's black square on a white background, with all its meager artistic sense, does contain a painterly idea, called by the painter "economy," or "fifth dimension," then Rodchenko's canvas

lacks any content whatsoever. It is a dull, mute, blind wall. The objection that could be raised by the assiduous supporters of historical chronology that such a canvas has already been exhibited by Malevich is of no relevance to me

1922

March–April
Exhibition of Provincial Art Schools at the All-Russian Conference on Artistic Education, Vkhutemas, Moscow

Without catalogue

May 14–20
Third Exhibition of Unovis, Institute of Artistic Practice, Vitebsk

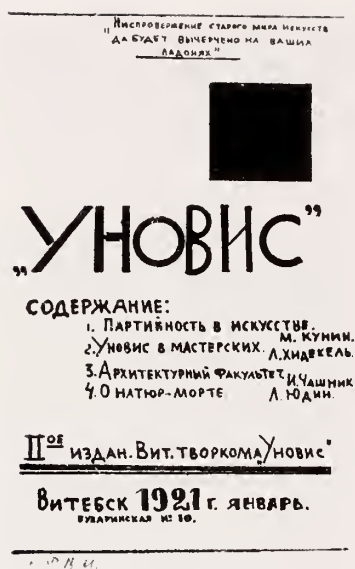
Without catalogue

June 15
Survey of New Trends in Art, Museum of Artistic Culture, Petrograd

Without a catalogue



STUDIES IN A UNOVIS STUDIO | MALEVICH IS AT THE BOARD
VITEBSK, 1921–22
State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg



COVER OF THE SECOND MAGAZINE UNOVIS, VITEBSK,
JANUARY 1921
Courtesy Vasilii Rakitin

October 15–ca. December 31

First Russian Art Exhibition, Galerie van Diemen, Berlin; traveled to the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, April 28 to May 28, 1923

123. *Suprematismus*; 124. *Suprematismus*; 125. *Suprematismus*; 126. *Weiss auf Weiss (White on White)*; 127. *Messerschleifer (Knife Sharpener)* (not exhibited in Amsterdam). Additions to Amsterdam: No. 607. *Portre*; No. 608. *Kompositie*; 400. *Umschlag, Lithographie*.

1923

January–March

Kazimir Malevich: Twenty-five Years of Work, Museum of Painterly Culture, Moscow

Without a catalogue

Opened May 17

Exhibition of Paintings of Petrograd Artists of all Tendencies 1918–1923, Academy of Fine Arts, Petrograd

Unovis affirms the progressive development of the system from Cubism to Futurism and Suprematism.

Cubist System

1253. *Still-Life*; 1254. *Cubist Construction*, 1255. *Still-Life*; 1256. *Violin*; 1257. *Still-Life*; 1258. *Still-Life*; 1259. *Still-Life*; 1260. *Smoker*; 1261. *Violin*; 1262. *Newspaper seller*; 1263. *Clock*; 1264. *Still-Life*; 1265. *Head*; 1266. *Head*; 1267. *Cubist Construction*; 1268. *Drawings*.

Futurist System

1269. *Locomotive*; 1270. *Skater*; 1271. *Movement of an Airplane*; 1272. *Electricity*; 1273. *Cubo-Futurist Construction*; 1274. *Movement of Machine*; 1275. *Dynamic Construction*; 1276. *Cinema*; 1277. *Projector*; 1278. *Drawings, Submarine, Projector*.

Suprematist System

1279. *Cubo-Suprematist Construction*; 1280. *Cubo-Suprematist Construction*; 1281. *Suprematist Section*; 1282. *Suprematist Mirror*; 1283. *Suprematist Section*; 1284. *Suprematist Construction*; 1285. *Suprematist Section*; 1286. *Suprematist Section*; 1287. *Suprematist Section*; 1288. *Suprematist Construction*; 1289. *Suprematist Section*; 1290. *Suprematist Section*; 1291. *Suprematist Construction*; 1292. *Suprematist Section*; 1293. *Suprematist Construction*; 1294. *Suprematist Construction*; 1295. *Suprematist Section*; 1296. *Suprematist Section*; 1297. *Suprematist Section*; 1298. *Suprematist Section*; 1299. *Suprematist Construction*; 1300. *Suprematist Section*; 1301. *Suprematist Section*; 1302. *Suprematist Section*; 1303. *Suprematist Section*; 1304. *Suprematist Section*; 1305. *Suprematist Construction*; 1306. *Suprematist Construction*; 1307. *Suprematist Section*; 1308. *Suprematist Section*; 1309. *Suprematist Section*; 1310. *Drawings Suprematist Cross Section*; 1311. *Cubo-Suprematist Construction*; 1312. *Cubo-Suprematist Construction*.

COMMENTARY

Nikolai Punin, "Gosudarstvennaia vystavka" ("State exhibition"), *Zhizn Iskusstva*, 1923

In order to understand Suprematist painting it is necessary ... to enter the "sect" (Unovis), otherwise one's understanding of Suprematism as a painterly phenomenon will only be approximate. I do not belong to the "sect" and therefore my opinion of Suprematist painting can only be relative.... Is Suprematist painting possible without the Suprematist system and ideology? Is it enough just to look at the Suprematist canvases or is also necessary to pay attention to the words in order to render a proper judgment? Is there more painting or ideology in Suprematism? All of these questions have been brusquely answered by two forms at the exhibition: two "white" canvases without any signs whatsoever. Regardless of the intensity of the canvases, they do not, of course, constitute any painterly value in and of themselves. Moreover, their material condition (the condition of the surfaces) is concealed by the artists. The canvases are mounted just below the ceiling and are meant to be seen at a distance. The purpose of these "pure" forms is to reveal, and to refer to, in the language of painting, a certain condition of the consciousness, under which the tension ("excitement") of the Suprematist (but no other) disposition is close, as far as I understand, to the painterly zero [nothing] about which Malevich has spoken so much of recently. What is of the greatest importance here is not the canvas itself but the ideological system that turns the canvas into a painterly event. Thus when Suprematists are asked whether anyone can exhibit such a canvas they reply in the negative adding that for this a great deal of inner tension is necessary, an answer that seems paradoxical to us non-Suprematists.

The introduction by Suprematism of an ideological system into painting reveals its rationalistic origins and leads to the conclusion that Suprematism ... is a secondary phenomenon. For what we see in painting above all else is an activity of the will and not of the intellect. We recognize in painting its independent significance, its "milieu."

This is the reason I counterpoise the Filonov-Matiushin-Malevich line to Tatlin's broad road

S. Iutkevich, "Sukharnaia stolitsa" ("The Rusk Capital"), *LEF* (No. 3, 1923), p. 183

"The only good canvas in the entire Unovis exhibition is an absolutely pure, white canvas with a very good prime coating. Something could be done on it "

1924

May 27–June 8

Retrospective Exhibition of the Activities of the Museum of Artistic Culture (Exhibition of Works of the Research Departments MKhK), Ginkhuk, Leningrad

Without catalogue

July 19–September 30

Fourteenth International Exhibition of Art, Soviet Pavilion, Giardini, Venice

111. *Suprematismo = forma quadrata*; 112. *Suprematismo = forma di croce*; 113. *Suprematismo = forma rotonda*, 346. *Supremo = planit*, 347. *Chino = planit*, 348. *Suprematismo in architettura*; 349. *Futuro = planit*; 350. *Planit di aviatore*; 351. *Planit di un Sanatorio*.

—Not all of Malevich's cited works were part of the exhibition due to last-minute organizational problems.

1925

April 28–?

International Exhibition of Decorative and Industrial Modern Arts, Grand Palais, Paris

Suprematist porcelain forms by Malevich decorated by his students.

Opened September 13–?

Left Currents in Russian Painting of the Last Fifteen Years, Museum of Painterly Culture, Moscow

Without catalogue

COMMENTARY

V. Perelman, ["From the itinerants to heroic realism"], *4 goda AkhRR* (Moscow, 1926

Let us try to understand the "art philosophy" of one of the founders of the extreme, so-called left, currents in art I am referring to Kazimir Malevich

It is important to pay serious attention to those "gems" that are strewn about by Malevich in his "On New Systems in Art."

Malevich appears here as an advocate of intuition. Everything that Malevich writes about the "fifth dimension" (the fourth dimension is not enough for him) is hopelessly weak. It wouldn't hurt for him to learn from Uspensky or Khinton, who write about this in a much more interesting way.

Something like a manifesto: the establishment of "a" in art. There is no need in going over all of the points, but some of them are a real "revelation."

In point 15 Malevich renounces all the "blessings of heaven." He certainly does not need them, as in point 14 there is the "way of complementary provisions"; and it is on these provisions, which they've elicited from the revolution, that the Maleviches have lived a free and easy life until very recently.

In point 12 Malevich makes an appeal to "consider labor a vestige of the violent old world." Just a minute Citizen Malevich, but what about the tenet "that labor shall rule the world" and one of the basic provisions of the Soviet Constitution "he who does not work does not eat?" There is no logic here.

Are these the ravings of a paranoiac? Or are these "revelations" of the prophet from Vitebsk a brazen mockery of common sense? For nearly five years young artists have been fed this counterrevolutionary nonsense which has caused them great harm. Instead of the life-giving force of authentic mass art they were taught this drivel, and there were some fools who were taken in by it!

After all this they have the unmitigated gall to claim that "Cubism and Futurism were revolutionary movements in art anticipating the economic and political revolution of 1917."

Now it appears that we had no inkling that the forerunner of the October Revolution was the October revolution in the fine arts led by the Maleviches."

The great stylist Flaubert said somewhere that "aesthetics is only the highest justice." In the name of this highest justice, which must be concentrated in each genuine work of art, it is necessary for us to cast away from ourselves the rubbish of nonobjectivism and epigonism.

November 29–January 31, 1926

First Annual Exhibition of the Scientific Section of the Commissariat of Enlightenment, Historical Museum, Moscow

Without catalogue

1926

February 27–March 25

First International Exhibition of Modern Architecture, Palace of Fine Arts, Warsaw

Studies for the first group of *Suprematist Planits: Calm*, two original drawings, 1924, *nonobjective Suprematist Planit-Construction, Unovis-Suprematism-Future Planits (Houses) of the Earth Dwellers (People)*, original drawing, 1923

May 30–June 15

Retrospective Exhibition of Works of the Institute of Artistic Culture for the Scholastic Year 1925–1926, Ginkhuk, Leningrad

Without catalogue

COMMENTARY

Letter from V. Yermolayeva to M. Larionov, July 17, 1926:

The exhibition with which we concluded the current year, and which included several architectonic models by Malevich—about 25, and by his direct assistants, and also the research departments where we dig about in painting itself and color; in the structure of color, in color fields in the constructions of the form, in everything specific that

differentiates the artist from photography and the movies, advertising, newspapers, books and other carriers of current ideas. We are obliged to clarify for the first time that painting in and of itself has its own orbit and that its culture, having reached the second stage of Cubism, has ended forever and can only go backwards from Cézanne to Corot, softer and flabbier; that 100 percent of it has already been achieved and modernity will work only in color; and all the art of the plastic will go into architecture, in which the classicism of the epoch will be completed, although not very soon.

—Quoted from E. F. Kovtun, M. M. Babanazarova, E. D. Gazieva, *Avangard, ostanovlennyy na begu* (Leningrad: Izd-vo "Avrora," 1989).

October 31–November

Exhibition of Paintings, Graphics, Sculpture, and Architecture of the Association of Painters "Four Arts," Historical Museum, Moscow

159. *Suprematist Art in the Construction of Three-Dimensional Objects*

Suprematist Order

a/Alfa

b/Una

c/Theta

—In the supplementary and corrected catalogue edition, Malevich's works are absent.

1927

March 20–25

Exhibition of Kazimir Malevich, Club of Polish Artists, Hotel Polonia, Warsaw

Without catalogue

COMMENTARY

Jan Klecinski, *Suprematism* [excerpt from the article "Idea and Form. Essays on the Development of Polish Art"] (Warsaw, ca. 1931)

Suprematism is authentic abstract art. Malevich has set forth its principles in Warsaw. Although they were simple, exalted, and puritanical, they



MALEVICH'S EXHIBITION AT THE GROBE BERLINER KUNSTAUSSTELLUNG, BERLIN, MAY 7–SEPTEMBER 30, 1927
Courtesy State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg

were empty. This is a combination of purely abstract and actual geometric bodies and planes, relating to each other in a certain way and in certain proportions. Perhaps there is a lyricism in this. But the theoretician does not speak of it. He speaks only of forms which he creates out of abstraction, without any regard as to whether anyone has ever used them.

Suprematism could die of abstractionist consumption, of from a lack of blood which is carried by reality. He makes the impression of being emasculated, even though he produces the illusion of creation, something like the ideas of Plato; even though he lays claim to taking the place of the lord God in the invention of new forms. There is some irrationality in this, some sort of madness in this escape from reality; there is the pride of a man who would like to be God, but there is something of the gramophone as well, who believes that with a richness of ideas one can defend works of art.

Konrad Vinkler, [The Exhibition of Prof. Malevich in the Club of Polish Artists and the Theory of Suprematism], *Kurier Poranny* (No. 89, March 30, 1927), p. 3

The Spirit of Russian mysticism and alienation fertilizes these undertakings in the sphere of pure abstraction, which are carried to an extreme and absurd level, overvaluing the metaphysical side of the creative process.

That is why the metaphysical and theoretical staff of Suprematism has two ends, one of which could be brought to bear against it and cast doubt on the individuality of the creator of this current.

May 14–September 30

Special Exhibition of Malevich. Greater Berlin Art Exhibition, Lehrter Bahnhof, Berlin

308. *Sonderausstellung*

COMMENTARY

Ernst Kallai, "Kazimir Malevich," *Das Kunstblatt* (Berlin, 1927), No. 7

At *The Great Berlin Art Exhibition* there is a wide-ranging display of the oeuvre of the Russian painter encompassing his entire development.

The exhibition begins with his Impressionist and Post-Impressionist paintings and organically follows his development through cubism and futurism to conclude with the works already mentioned. Planes are applied to planes, at first varied and multicolored but at the end only white on white resulting in faded paintings lacking in form and enlivened only by texture. This is the point of departure for his architectural sketches in which realistic three-dimensional constructions reappear in the area of the latest conquest of painting—the world of illusory space.

The last paintings were painted at the very latest a few years ago. All of the new works pursue or declare architectural goals. It is quite difficult to imagine what further development in painting is possible beyond what has been achieved—white on white planes.

Malevich's oeuvre deserves to be the object of attention. It possesses a strong individual originality that organically links West European resonance with profoundly Russian characteristics.

A. V. Lunacharsky, "Russkie khudozhniki v Berline" ("Russian Artists in Berlin"), *Ogoniok*, No. 30, 1927 (Quoted from: A.V. Lunacharsky, *Ob iskusstve* (*On art*) (Moscow: "Iskusstvo," 1982), vol. 2, pp. 214–16.

Russian artists have taken up a prominent position at the exhibition. First of all there is an enormous room dedicated to a retrospective, systematic exhibition of the oeuvre of our famous "Suprematist" Malevich.

The artist Malevich, in spite of the exclusivity of his approach to painting is, of course, a great master. It is not surprising that in a country where the incomprehensible Kandinsky could be successful, the more synthetic and courageous Malevich would also find favor, especially after his present turn towards hard and harsh painting.

It is here that Malevich has been able for the first time to exhibit his work in a comprehensive manner. Severe and assiduous like his models the icon and the "Iubok," Malevich is at heart a classicist who does not permit his colors to intermingle and thus, so to speak, lose their essence.

In his genre Malevich has achieved considerable results and shown great skill. I don't know if such canvases will be produced after him, but I am sure that his style, already applied by the late Popova as a decorative method, could have a great future in this respect.

In Malevich's latest works exhibited in Berlin he posits and resolves the same problems but in the *piano*, *pianissimo* rather than *forte* mode. The works in question are very pale and practically one-toned. At times it seems that the surfaces—white-cream, pale pink, rough on smooth—can be differentiated by texture alone and not by color.

It is possible not to value Malevich's paintings, that is, not receive any pleasure from them. Looking at his works, however, it is impossible not to recognize his talent, persistence and the existence of a system.

The problem arises when Malevich stops painting and begins to write brochures. I heard that the Germans were also taken aback by his writings. I made an attempt to read the grandiloquent and obscure theoretical works by the leader of the "Suprematists." In a confused manner he seems to try to somehow link his goals and path with the revolution and with God.

July 23–October 9

Werkbund Exhibition: The Apartment, International Exhibition of Plans and Models in the New Art of Building, Interim Theaterplatz beim Neuen Schloss, Stuttgart

1 *Architectural Model*; 452 *Architectural Model*

November 1–?

New Currents in Art, State Russian Museum, Leningrad

Without catalogue

1928

February 6–?

First Exhibition of the History of Applied Art, Institute of Art History, Leningrad

Without catalogue

COMMENTARY

V. Yermolaieva, "Vystavka prikladnovo iskusstvoznania" ("Exhibition of Applied Art"), *Zhizn iskusstva* (Leningrad), February 28, 1928, no. 9

Malevich in his experimental work endeavors to resolve the problem of the new decorative design for architecture and things. The models, components and fragments exhibited by him are meant to establish a definite style which can be applied in all areas of artistic construction and artistic industry. He works on the basis of the system of Suprematism which he discovered earlier (in 1913). He develops in three dimensions the same rhythm and order of forms that he discovered for plane constructions. Malevich called his models *Arkhitektons*, emphasizing their nonobjective content

March 10–?

Modernist Salon, Salon of the Union of Plastic Artists, Warsaw

68. *Suprematist Painting*

November–December

Exhibition of Works of the State Commissions for the Acquisition of Works of Fine Art in 1927–28, State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow

384. *Suprematist Arkhitekton and Planit*



MALEVICH'S INSTALLATION IN THE EXHIBITION *NEW CURRENTS IN ART*, STATE RUSSIAN MUSEUM, LENINGRAD, NOVEMBER 1927
State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg

1929

October 6–November 3

Abstract and Surrealist Painting and Sculpture, Kunsthau, Zürich

71. *Composition*

November 1–?

Exhibition of Works of Malevich, State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow

30. *Square*, 1913, 31. *Circle*, 1913; 32. *Two Planes in Intersection*, 1913; 33. *Red Square*, 1914, 34. *Untitled (Suprematist Object)*, n.d.; 35. *Untitled (Suprematist Object)*, n.d.; 36. *Untitled (Suprematist Object)*, n.d.; 37. *Untitled (Suprematist Object)*, n.d.; 50. *Four Arkhitektons*, ca. 1922, and *Seven Fragments of Arkhitektons*

COMMENTARY

A. Fiodorov-Davydov, "Iskusstvo K. S. Malevicha" ("The Art of K. S. Malevich"), Moscow: State Tretyakov Gallery, 1929, pp. 6, 9.

But soon the artist completely rejects the object, breaking it down into its component parts, which he rearranges in different combinations, taken from different points of view in an arbitrary composition (Cubism, 1911–12). He breaks down objects to their basic geometric forms (circle, square, two intersecting planes) and turns them into the basis of his abstract Cubist constructions

The logical outcome of this was abstract nonobjective art (1913–18) and the conditions for the transmission of “pure” movement in space and the free combinations of simple geometric forms (Suprematism).

His architectural works are abstract thoughts on architectural themes rather than real projects. He is a subjectivist and a dreamer-philosopher. However, this in no way interferes with his works having their own objective significance. His Suprematist painting has already achieved its goal in textiles and other areas of the decorative arts. Western architects are showing a great deal of interest in his “planits” and “Arkhitektons.” The great imagination and expressiveness of his well-developed forms provide a wealth of material for workings architects.

I. V. Kliun, “Problema tsveta v zhivopisi 1928–1929” (“The Problem of Light in Painting 1928–1929”), *Maliarnoie Delo* (1931), no. 2

It seems that at a well-known point, some artists, whether consciously or not, begin to avoid perceiving colors in a normal way. The example of the artist Malevich is only typical. It is well known that Malevich is an extremely energetic and original artist who, several years ago, painted paintings with bright and powerful colors. At the same time he also painted red squares and black circles—“points” as he called them. Time passed, his temperament abated and he began to paint differently—in calm, even pale hues (“white on white”) and now his squares were painted black. Now he answers the question as to in what form it is best to look at red color he replies: “of course, in the round one.”

—Quoted from: I. V. Kliun, *Moi put v iskusstve: Vospominaniia, Stati, dnevniki* (My Path in Art: Reminiscences, Articles, Diaries) (Moscow: Izd-vo “RA”: Literaturno-khudozhestvennoe agentstvo “Russkii avangard,” 1999), p. 368.

1930

Ca. April–June

Solo Exhibition of Malevich's Works, Kiev Picture Gallery, Kiev

Without catalogue

COMMENTARY

S. Yefimovich, “Vistavka tvoriv khudozhnika K. S. Malevicha v Kievskoi Kartinni Galereie” (“Exhibition of the Works of the Artist K. S. Malevich in the Kiev Picture Gallery”), *Radziansko mistetstvo* (Kiev, 1930), no. 14

The exhibition of the works of the artist K.S. Malevich at the art gallery is a backward glance at his activity of the past thirty-five years. However, not all of the stages of development of this extremely prolific artist are represented by the forty-five works on display, and this makes the exhibition somewhat incomplete.

Beginning with 1913, the abstract-formal tendencies in the oeuvre of K. S. Malevich reached their apogee. The logical conclusion of this activity resulted in a definitive nonobjectivity. The real thing is now completely removed; it is not even used to solve formal problems. In this period he creates in order to reveal “pure” space, “pure” movement, “pure” paint.... His tendency is now called Suprematism—a name he himself created. His Suprematism brought him to the realization that the old figurative art was dead.

The task of Suprematism according to Malevich is to establish three elements—three basic formulas: 1) the square; 2) the circle; and 3) two intersecting planes. These three elements are represented at the exhibition by three canvases on which a black square, circle and cross are painted on a white background. According to Malevich these elements are the future of art, out which—as they become more complex—a new artistic culture will be created.

Beginning in 1922–23 Malevich moves on to the final stage of his work which continues to this day. Malevich has abandoned painting in favor of creating new architectural forms for the age of industrialization.

The designs for the architectural structures that are represented at the exhibition are all executed in white, but now Malevich is also taking up the question of painting different parts of the buildings in different colors. His painted Suprematist planits are the preparatory work for this.

Even though Malevich was greatly influenced by foreign art, he is by no means and epigone and mere follower of the artistic thought of the West. He has always made his own contributions. Sometimes he has even anticipated artistic developments in Europe by discovering certain formal aspects of art before European artists.

However, in spite on all of the wonderful aspects of Malevich's creative work, the foundation of his artistic activity is foreign to proletarian culture. His entire work conveys the notion that he, as a bourgeois artist, needs art not for serving society but only for the sake of form.

Although he is subjectively distant from the new life of our republic, Malevich, who has done much for the development of art in the age of industrialization, may objectively be useful in solving problems now faced by our artistic culture.... His influence can be seen in the production of porcelain, textiles, printing, posters and “luboks.” ... It is in this formal sense that the exhibition of the works of Malevich at the gallery could be useful to the Soviet viewer.

June 8–?

Exhibition of Works of the State Commission for the Acquisition of Plastic Arts, 1928–29, State Tretiakov Gallery, Moscow

80. K. S. Malevich, Leningrad, 2 Soiuza Sviazi Street, apt. 5

125. “Arkhitekton. Planit—Monument motif” painted, plaster. Workshop “(4 Arts)” Pr. 1929–30

1931–1932

June 15–early 1932

Art in the Age of Imperialism, State Russian Museum, Leningrad

Without catalogue



MALEVICH'S INSTALLATION IN "THE EXHIBITION ART OF 'THE EPOCH OF IMPERIALISM' STATE RUSSIAN MUSEUM, LENINGRAD, 1931–32
Courtesy State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg

November–February 1932

Experimental Comprehensive Exhibition of Art from the Age of Capitalism, State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow

Without catalogue

November 13–May 1933

Artists of the RSFSR of the Past Fifteen Years, State Russian Museum, Leningrad

Spatial Suprematism. Arkhitektons.

1227. *Designs for Household Implements*, 1228. *Arkhitektons: Alfa, Beta* and others, 1929 *Architectural Ornaments: a, b, c*; 1230–35. *Theme of Architectural Monuments in Parks and Squares: a, b, c, d, e*; 1236. *Column for the Memorial Land of the Soviets*; 1237 *Black Square.*; 1238. *Red Square*, 1913, 1239. *Dynamic Color Composition*; 1240. *Decoration of Walls*; 1241. *Suprematist Plane-Table—drawing*; 1242 *The Principle of Wall-Paintings*, 1919; 1243. *Formula of Spatial Suprematism*, 1244 *Spatial Suprematism. Dynamic Coloring*, 1916, 1245. *Spatial Suprematism*, 1920; 1246. *Little House in a Field*, 1247 *Harvest*; 1248. *Colored Composition: Female Torso on Light Blue*; 1249 *Colored Compositions: Female Torso on White*; 1250. *Woman's Portrait*, 1251. *Red House*; 1252. *Two Figures in the Field*; 1253. *Colored Composition: Three Figures*; 1254 *Red Cavalry*, 255. *Sportsmen*; 1256. *Woman with a Rake: Colored Composition*.

1933–34

June 27–March?

Artists of the RSFSR of the Past Fifteen Years, Historical Museum, Moscow

508. *Girl with Red Staff*, 1932, 509. *Prototype of New Image*; 510. *Sketch for Abstract Portrait*, 1933; 511 *Woman Worker*, 1933; 512. *Woman's Portrait*

Exhibits not in catalogue *Black Square* (State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow); *Suprematism* (State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow); *Composition (Dynamic Suprematism)* (State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow)

COMMENTARY

N. Bukharin, "Nekotorie mysli o sovetskoi zhivopisi" ("Several Thoughts on Soviet Art"), *Izvestiia* (July 11, 1933), no. 172, p. 3

A group of formalists and nonobjectivists ("Black Square"), etc., are ensconced in a separate section of the exhibition. The well-known Tatlin has also taken up his position there. Soviet art is now developing in such a way so as to bring about the demise of formalism; this can be clearly seen from the isolated position of this entire group. . . Abstraction "from content" kills "form" itself. Having reached the limits of the impoverishment of reality, maximum abstractedness, utmost "purity" and an enormous severing of form from content, art has unavoidably come up against a dead end—it has come to its end. . . abstraction "from content" means the death of painting. . . Here one can see the dead end of bourgeois art.

A. Efros, "Vchera, sevodnia, zavtra" ("Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow"), *Iskusstvo* (1933), no. 6, p. 41

Malevich, the father of Suprematism, colorist, geometer and apologist of abstract architecture, has presented the exhibition with an unexpected gift: he has declared his return to realism and sent proof of his conversion—a series of works in which he expresses his movement towards contemporary realism. Sounds good! In reality things are different. Imagine a series of canvases, start-

ing with the contours of abstract compositions and finishing with a human figure, which imitates the models of French portrait painting of the time of Clouet [Klue].

Tatlin and Malevich were initially comrades in arms but have ended up taking opposing positions. One is a Futurist who poured art into industry and the other is retrospectivist, who is ready to be a realist as long it's the realism of 1630.

O. Beskin, "Formalizm v zhivopisi" ("Formalism in Painting"), *Iskusstvo* (1933), no. 6, p. 41

Formalism in any branch of the arts, but especially in painting is now the major form of bourgeois influence.

Suprematists, artists without any subject matter—knights of black squares and geometric combinations of evenly colored in planes who completely deny any ideological content in art. The leaders of the remnants of this tendency are Malevich, Kliun, Suetin

The "constructivist system of form-paint" as an end in itself was taken by the nonobjectivists, with the logical consistency of people completely divorced from reality and the real requirements of the proletarian masses, to its extreme. Their "paintings" became purely geometrical constructions of planes, three-dimensional figures and lines. Only in the combinations of contrasting colors and the contours themselves was the



MALEVICH AT THE EXHIBITION ART OF 'THE RSFSR OF THE PAST FIFTEEN YEARS' STATE RUSSIAN MUSEUM, LENINGRAD, 1932
Courtesy Vasili Rakitin

"essence" of this garret-anarchist "riot." Logical conclusion: Malevich's solitary *Black Square* as the highest achievement in art; a complete dead end. And this dead end of a nonideological, feeble art stuck in the rear of the most reactionary ideology of European art was proclaimed as the death of art itself.

P. Kerzhentsev, "O Tretiakovskoi galeree" ("On the Tretiakov Gallery"), *Pravda* (June 7, 1936)

For some reason the management of the Tretiakov gallery considers it necessary to exhibit even the absurd works of Malevich and Kandinsky. Kandinsky's "painting" is called "Composition"—clearly an ironic name, because in these formless lines and light blots there is chaos, typical of the artist and his thinking. The management of the Tretiakov Gallery even respectfully exhibited such a mockery of a work as Malevich's *Black Square*. On a framed white field there is a big black square. Really, such a profound thought! What a high level of technique, what color, what a brilliant representation of an era.



MALEVICH LYING IN STATE IN HIS APARTMENT, LENINGRAD, 1935
Courtesy Vasilii Rakitin

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Kazimir Malevich*

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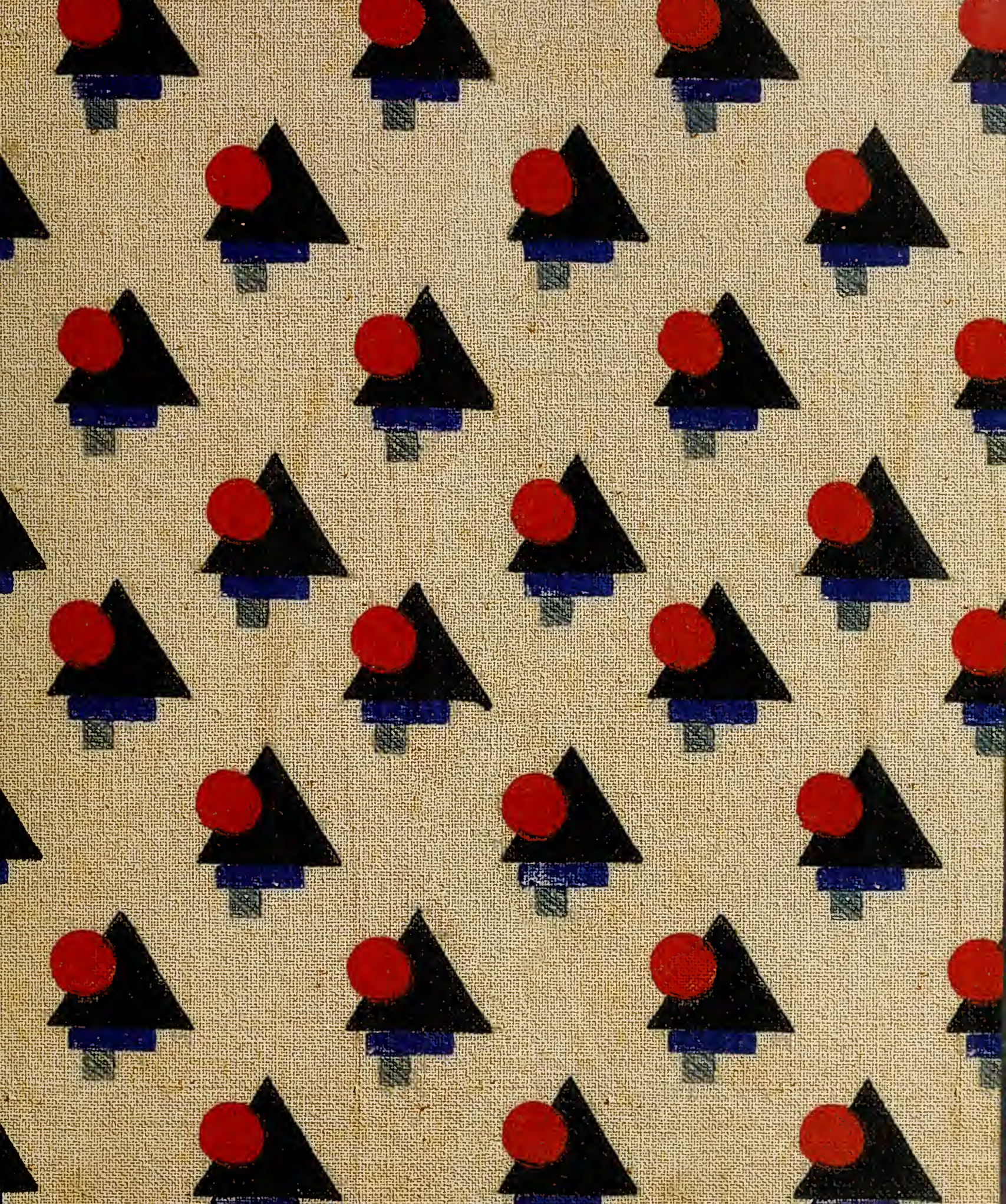
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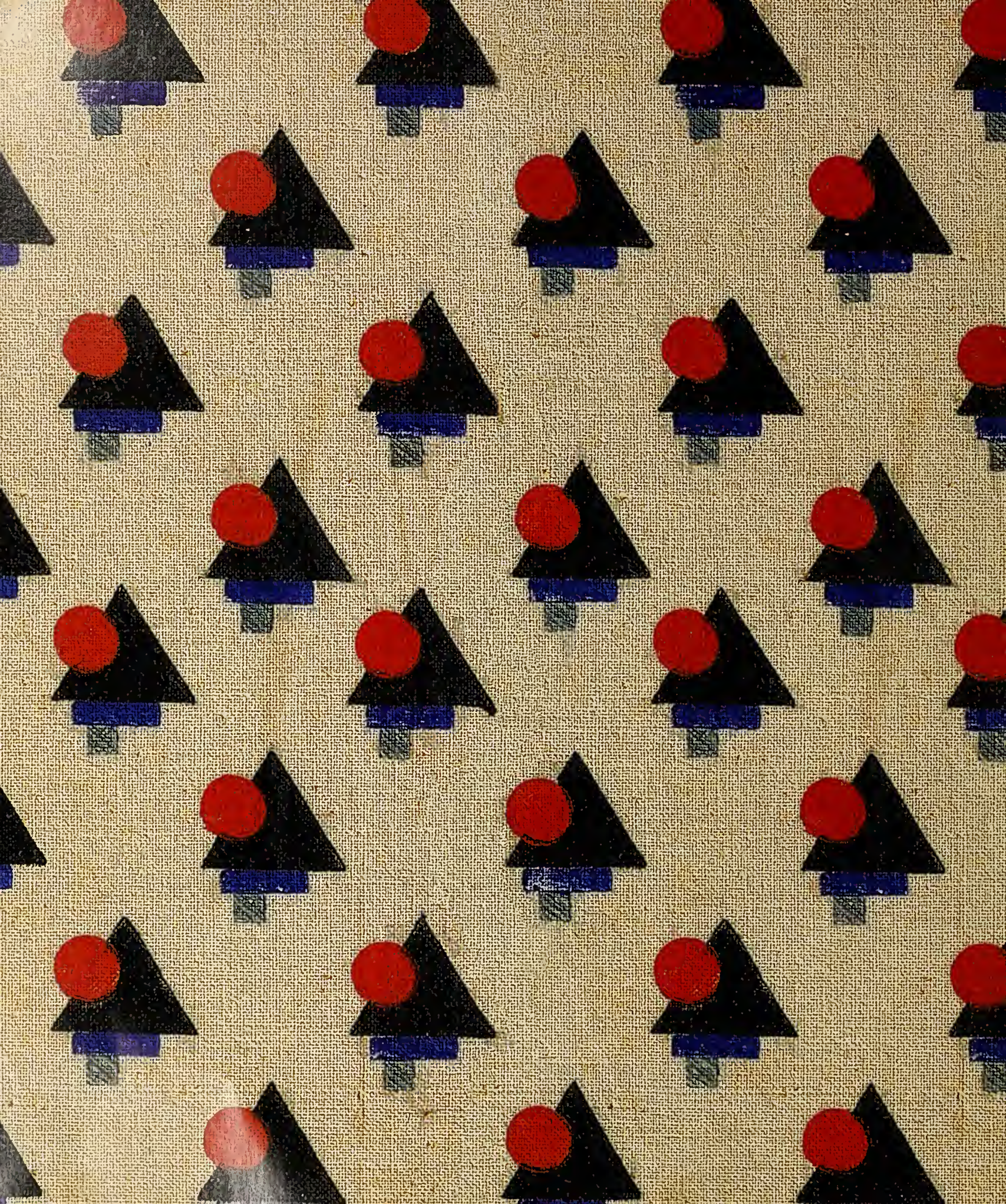
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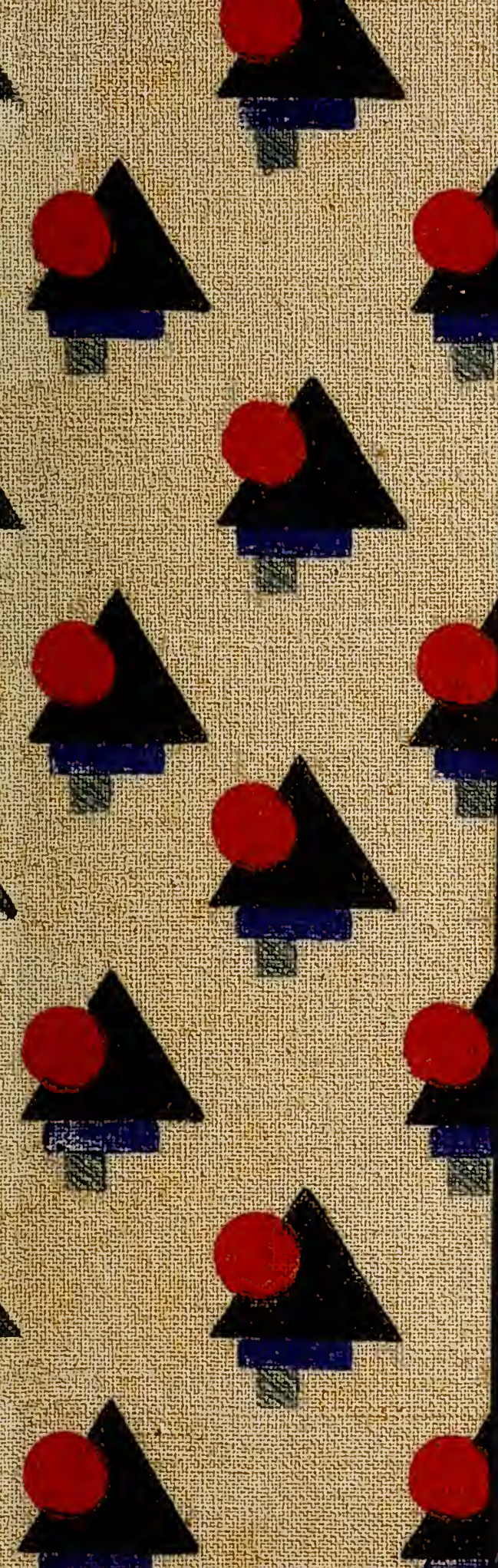
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