

Key Stage 4 + 5: Art and Design

Also suitable for: English, History, Design
and Technology, Citizenship, Humanities,
Photography, Film Studies

Teacher Resource

Revolution: Russian Art 1917–1932

Welcome to the RA

Created for teachers, this resource is packed with activities that will help your pupils get the most out of our *Revolution: Russian Art 1917–1932* exhibition. The activities in each section are provided as a selection to choose from, rather than a definitive sequence to complete in order. Throughout this resource you will find both practical and discussion-based activities.

This RA teacher resource includes:

Introduction

This overview of the exhibition will give you an insight into its context.

Pre-visit

These are activities to complete in class before your students come to a workshop, self-directed visit or guided tour of the exhibition.

At the RA

These are activities for your class to complete while at the exhibition on a self-directed visit.

Back in the classroom

Practical and discussion activities inspired by your visit will help consolidate and build on what your students have learned.

Key artworks and information about the artists

These illustrations of a selection of artworks from the exhibition can be used as the basis for classroom discussion.

Worksheets

Print these off to use pre-visit, at the RA or back in the classroom.

Exhibition map

This floorplan of the galleries will help you plan your visit.

Introduction

Politics and history

Revolution: Russian Art 1917–1932 explores the extraordinary diversity of art made during one of the most turbulent periods in modern history. The story begins in February 1917 with the abdication of the repressive Tsar, Nicholas II. In October of the same year, Vladimir Lenin and the socialist Bolshevik Party swept to power, ending centuries of autocratic rule under the Tsars and making Russia the world's first Communist state. At the same time, civil war broke out as the Reds (Communists) and Whites (Tsarist Russians) fought for control. After Lenin's death in 1924, Joseph Stalin rose to power. Under his dictatorship, the Soviet Union, as the Republic was now known, became increasingly repressive. Freedom of the individual was crushed in favour of a collective ideology.

For more information visit the BBC Bitesize website <http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/gcsebitesize/history/mwh/russia/lifeinleninsrussiarev1.shtml>

The RA exhibition

The Royal Academy's far-ranging exhibition brings to life the art produced in Russia during these years of radical upheaval, reflecting the political and social climate of the period. As well as painting, photography, printmaking, film and sculpture the exhibition presents posters, textiles and ceramics created by artists representing many different social and political points of view. The RA's exhibition takes its inspiration from a November 1932, exhibition in Leningrad (St. Petersburg) titled Fifteen Years of Artists of the Russian Soviet Republic. Nikolai Punin, an art scholar and writer, curated this exhibition with the ambitious goal of including all the artistic developments of the period and marking an important moment in the history of Russian art.

Art in Russia 1917 to 1932

During the heady, idealistic days after the Revolution, Kazimir Malevich, Vasily Kandinsky and others pursued their experiments in pure colour and form to create new art for a new world. These artists were known as the avant-garde and they believed art transmitted political ideas and the aspirations of society.

Suprematism

Malevich was the founder of Suprematism, a word that refers to an abstract art based upon 'the primacy of pure feeling' rather than on the visual depiction of objects. Malevich argued that art should no longer aim to depict reality but create a whole new world of its own. His Suprematist paintings focused on basic geometric forms painted in a limited range of strong colours.

Constructivism

Visionary architect and designer Vladimir Tatlin conceived a new artistic movement Constructivism in 1913. He saw art as a fundamentally useful activity, as work, capable of remaking and remodelling the world for a new era. The Constructivists advocated the abandonment of traditional painting and sculpture, in favour of actual interventions into the world itself: architecture, graphic design and objects.

Socialist Realism

Under Stalin's dictatorship the Soviet Union, as the Republic was now known, became increasingly repressive. In 1932, Stalin issued a decree that all art should express Soviet ideology, clamping down on years of relative artistic freedom and experimentation. The Communist Party decreed Socialist Realism as the only acceptable style of art, demanding that artists produce figurative art that could be easily understood by the masses. Artists were to portray idealistic scenes of Soviet life: youthful, strong workers in factories, men and women at one with machinery on farms. If artists deviated from what was acceptable they could be cut off from support or sent to the 'Gulag' (prison camp).

The role of art

After the Revolution, the new Communist government used art in a variety of ways:

Art and propaganda

In 1917, eighty per cent of the Russian population were illiterate and living in small villages scattered across Russia's vast landmass. The government set about a rigorous campaign to use art, architecture, sculpture and other visual means to persuade and educate the people about Communism. Public works of art and memorials were built across the country. Artists were commissioned to paint banners and murals, and factories were encouraged to create products that championed the greatness of Communism.

Depicting leaders

In April 1918, Lenin announced his Plan for Monumental Propaganda. Painting and sculpture, and even such everyday items as fabrics and ceramics, were to promote Bolshevik ideas and glorify the leader. Russia was a profoundly Christian country but soon the Russian Orthodox Church was banned. 'Icons' of Lenin replaced those of Christ. Although Lenin had personally opposed Stalin as his successor, the cult status that Lenin acquired after his death legitimised Bolshevik power and, eventually, Stalin's autocratic rule.

The greatness of the worker

The Communist Party celebrated the rise of the factory, the machine and the worker, using images of workers and factories as a source for propaganda for the masses. Avant-garde and Realist artists alike were encouraged to portray this growth in technology, using the machine as a symbol of power and optimism for the new Russia. The Communist party also saw the strong, healthy, hard-working rural farm worker as an important part of Soviet Russia. They were promoted as equal to the urban workers, symbolised by the hammer and the sickle of the Soviet emblem. In 1928, Stalin began to introduce his Five-Year Plans for both industry and agriculture that aimed to improve production. The first of these three Five-Year Plans introduced collective farming, which uprooted rural communities and meant people destroyed their farming equipment in protest. Famine was widespread and millions died.

Nostalgia and memory

Even in revolutionary times, the traditional images of Tsarist Russia, such as birch forests and colourful onion-shaped church domes, persisted as signs of national identity. Many Russian artists, philosophers and writers were nostalgic for the beauty and charm of the old Russia, rapidly disappearing under the boots of the proletarian masses. During this era of state nationalisation and confiscation of private and ecclesiastical property, artists expressed their longing for a country that no longer existed in lyrical paintings and exquisite art journals.

Pre-visit

These activities will encourage students to:

understand the historical context of the exhibition

explore the different art mediums and styles artists used to respond to the political, social and economic climate of Russia from 1917 to 1932

gain experience and confidence in discussing and analysing works of art

discover how art can be used as propaganda

experiment with art materials and techniques



The avant-garde, art and politics



'Remake everything. Organise it so as to make everything new, so that our false, dirty, boring, ugly life becomes just, clean, happy and beautiful.'

— Alexander Blok

How did the art of the time transmit political ideas and the aspirations of society?

Look at Malevich's *Suprematism*, 1915-6, and discuss in class:

- 1 What do you see in the painting? Describe the different colours, shapes and their arrangement.
- 2 How did Malevich organise the different elements in this painting?
- 3 What is the focal point of the composition?
- 4 Malevich sought to emphasize 'the primacy of pure feeling'. Do you think he succeeded? Explain your answer.
- 5 How does this painting capture the revolutionary atmosphere of 1915-16?
- 6 How could this painting be seen as a rebellion or revolution?



Realism



'Our civic duty before mankind is to set down, artistically or documentarily, the revolutionary impulse of this great moment in history.'

— the declaration of the Association of Artists of Revolutionary Russia (AKhRR), 1922.

The Association of Artists of Revolutionary Russia (AKhRR) was a group that was set up in 1922, to promote 'heroic realism' and 'artistic documentary'. The group aimed to present the day-to-day reality in Russia at the time and advocated an approach to art that was a precursor of Socialist Realism, protesting that they had a monopoly on Russian art and that they were 'drowning' the rest of the country's art world.

Compare these three artworks, by artists associated with the AKhRR:

V.I.Lenin and Manifestation, 1919 by Isaak Brodsky

By Lenin's Coffin, 1924 by Kuzma Petrov-Vodkin

The Bolshevik, 1920 by Boris Mikhailovich Kustodiev

For each artwork, discuss:

What is being depicted in this artwork?

How is the Communist party depicted in this artwork?

What message is being conveyed?

How does this artwork support the ideology behind the Russian Revolution?



Poster design



In this activity, students will understand the definition of political propaganda. They will then observe and discuss some persuasive pieces of Soviet propaganda in the exhibition and explore their use of visual language.

Select an artwork from those illustrated at the back of this resource, and present it to the class. Ask students to study it carefully analysing the content and composition of the piece. How might it have been used as a piece of propaganda? Why?

Discuss ways that people and governments use propaganda today: e.g. ways of persuading the public what to think, believe and want.

- 1 Work in pairs.
- 2 Agree upon a contemporary issue that matters to you.
- 3 Work together to design a poster that persuades the wider public to believe in your point of view on this issue.
- 4 Mind map some ideas in pairs, then divide a page in your sketchbooks into quarters and sketch out four quick visual ideas, in pencil.
- 5 While you plan your poster, think about the significance of different colours, emblems, shapes and objects, words and images.
6. Choose one idea and work it up on an A3 piece of paper, using pencils or paint.
- 7 Once you have finished, present your poster to your classmates and lead a discussion about the ideas and point of view you present in the poster. Describe the visual and emotional impact of the final piece.
- 8 Ask the class if your poster has persuaded them to think differently.



Poster design

Were you successful in communicating your ideas? Why or why not?

What are the challenges of using visual language to attempt to influence or persuade your audience?

What are the benefits of using a symbols and images rather than words?

Materials

Pencils | Paints | Brushes | Sketchbook | A3 paper

At the RA

These activities will encourage students to:

look carefully at, describe, record and analyse artworks in the exhibition

share their interpretation of different artworks

Before coming to the RA, look at a map of the exhibition (provided later in this resource) and select the rooms you would like students to focus on during your visit.

Students can work in pairs or small groups of 3 to 4.

We encourage students to sketch and draw in the galleries using pencils.



Record and describe



First, send your students off to explore the exhibition independently, using the worksheet at the back of this resource to help them research and analyse different artworks in the different rooms. They should stop in no more than 3 or 4 rooms.



Sketch and compare



Direct your students to the rooms you would like them to visit. Ask them to observe two contrasting art works in each room. These works can differ in subjects, materials, scale or style.

Ask students to analyse each piece in pairs or small groups, using the worksheet at the back of this resource.

- 1 Sketch each of the two compositions in your sketchbook.
- 2 Note down your initial responses to each artwork. What was your first thought when you saw the artwork? Why did you think this?
- 3 Using the worksheet to help you, note down your analysis of the tone, colour, line, use of materials and composition.
- 4 What do you think each artist was responding to? Why do you think this?
- 5 Compare the two works of art. How are they similar? How are they different?
- 6 Make a note of any questions you have or any things you want to know more about.

Pick a few of the student groups to feed back in front of the work to the rest of the class (or alternatively back in the classroom).



Let's talk about photography



Look at some of the photographs in the exhibition. Choose one photograph:

- 1 What has the artist chosen to depict? What is the focus of the image? How does the artist draw attention to that focus?
- 2 How does the artist create a sense of drama?
- 3 Look at the title of the work. How does the title change the way you interpret the photograph?
- 4 What message was the artist trying to convey? Do you think the artist is successful in conveying this idea?
- 5 Is a photograph a more effective medium for propaganda than painting, sculpture, porcelain or textiles? Why do you think this?
- 6 How do you think people will view this work today? How is this different from the way it might have been seen when it was made?



Exploring porcelain and textiles



This exhibition presents a huge range of different media, from paintings and sculptures to posters and porcelain.

Ask students to look closely at porcelain and textiles in the exhibition. Choose three pieces of porcelain or textiles:

- What is depicted? If there are figures, who are they?
- What is being promoted, if anything?
- How has the artist used colour, line and composition?
- How have they used text?
- How would this piece of porcelain or textiles be used?
- Who made this artwork? Did they intend for it to be decorative or useful?

Back in the classroom

These activities will encourage students to:

engage in critical analysis and discussion of the artworks they saw in the RA exhibition

research the artists whose work they saw

create their own artworks in response



Grayson Perry RA

As a class, discuss the porcelain and textiles that you saw during the exhibition.

Grayson Perry RA creates ceramics and textiles that address contemporary issues. You can learn more about Grayson on the RA website.

Research examples of his ceramics and textiles.

Working in pairs, compare Grayson Perry's work with examples from *Revolution: Russian Art 1917–1932*:

- 1 How does Grayson Perry's social commentary compare to these historic examples?
- 2 What symbols does he regularly use? Why?
- 3 How did ceramics by revolutionary Russian artists differ to Grayson Perry's work?
- 4 What do you think Grayson Perry is trying to convey in his work?
- 5 How do you think ceramics and textiles differ from painting and sculpture?
- 6 What is the impact of using this type of media? How does its meaning change when displayed in an art gallery?

Bring the pairs together for a discussion with the entire class.

You will find that he has a new project creating two 'Brexit' vases, one representing 'leave' and one 'remain'.

There is a video at <https://www.rts.org.uk/article/grayson-perry-invites-viewers-help-brexit-themed-artwork> of Grayson asking people to contribute to his Brexit pots, one leave, one remain.



Figurative or abstract?

In this activity, students will compare different artworks produced by Pavel Filonov and Kazimir Malevich, looking at how each artist's style has changed aesthetically and the reasons for this. You will find these artworks illustrated at the end of this resource.

Pavel Filonov
Tractor workshop at the Putilovsky Factory, 1931-1932 (room 2, Man and Machine) and *Heads (Human in the World)*, 1925-1926 (room 3, Brave New World)

and

Kazimir Malevich
Suprematism, 1915-6 (room 4) and *Sportsmen*, 1930-1931 (room 4)

- 1 Looking at each artist in turn, analyse the subject of both their pieces.
- 2 Compare the different styles by analysing the use of line, form and colour.
- 3 When was each painting created? How might its historical context have affected the style of the artwork? How might the artist's personal experiences have affected the artwork?
- 4 Do you think the artist is in favour of the revolution or against it in the two artworks? How has their stance changed from one to the other? Why has it changed?
- 5 Which one do you prefer and why?



Figurative or abstract?



Either:

- a. choose one of the images that is more abstract and create a figurative interpretation of it

or

- b. choose one of images that is figurative and create an abstract interpretation of it

Think about your use of colour, materials, application and scale.

Materials
Colour print outs of the chosen images | Sketchbooks | Pens | Paint | Palettes | Brushes (all sizes) | A1 cartridge paper or board | Palette knives | Sponges | Water pots



Photomontage: the worker



Examples of photomontage:

Constructor [Self-Portrait with Dividers], 1924, by El Lissitsky (room 3, Brave New World)

Result of a Five-Year Plan, 1932, by Varvara Stepanova (room 10, Stalin's Utopia)

A photomontage is a combination of photographic images. Artists might use text, photographs and images from newspapers or magazines.

Photomontages were dynamic comments on the political and social climate of Russia during this period. Show your class examples of photomontages illustrated at the back of this resource. Remind the students of the many images of workers in the exhibition.

Create a photomontage on the theme of 'the worker'.

- 1 Collect black and white photographic images from newspapers and magazines. You can also print images from the internet.
- 2 Think about why you have selected these images and what they represent to you.
- 3 Think about signs and symbols
- 4 Sketch out a design for your photomontage in your sketchbook.
- 5 Think about composition, the overall arrangement and balance, tone, line and focal point. Will you add colour?
- 6 Collage together your images to create a photomontage.



Photomontage: the worker

Encourage students to discuss and analyse the outcome with the class.

How did their photomontage reflect the theme of 'the worker'?

How did they use a visual language to communicate their ideas?

What are the challenges in working with photomontage?

Look at contemporary examples of photomontage by artists such as Gilbert and George, Wangechi Mutu and Kara Walker.

Discuss:

What issues are these artists commenting on?

Why do you think they use this medium?

How does the process and the outcome of this medium differ from painting or regular photographic methods?

Materials
Examples of photomontages to show the class | Collected photographs | Photocopies | Photocopier | Newspapers | Magazines | PVA glue | Spreaders | Scissors | Craft knives | A3 paper

Kazimir Malevich (1878-1935)

Kazimir Malevich stands out among the artists of the avant-garde for his total commitment to a whole new way of thinking about art and life. In 1915-6 Malevich painted *Suprematism*, a work that represents his theory of the same name, with which he aimed to express 'pure feeling', abandoning the real world and instead turning to geometric shapes and bold colours. He was arrested in Russia in 1927, following a trip to Germany where he had been teaching and receiving critical success.

Malevich continued to work in this geometric, bold style, exhibiting his Suprematist works alongside his more "figurative" work in the 1932 exhibition organised by Nikolai Punin. He tried to make the case that his Suprematist works had been a precursor to the political revolution. His works of the early 1930s depicted peasants, workers and sportsmen but did not fit the doctrine of Socialist Realism. Instead, these faceless figures protested the damaging policies of collective farming under Stalin.



Kazimir Malevich
Suprematism, 1915-16
Oil on canvas, 80.5 x 81 cm

State Russian Museum, St Petersburg
Photo © 2017, State Russian Museum, St Petersburg



Kazimir Malevich
Sportsmen, 1930-31
Oil on canvas, 142 x 164 cm

State Russian Museum, St Petersburg
Photo © 2017, State Russian Museum, St Petersburg

Kuzma Petrov-Vodkin (1878-1939)

Unlike some other artists in the exhibition, Petrov-Vodkin maintained his style of painting from 1917 to 1932, though he changed the content of his work. He trained as an icon painter and studied art in Petrograd, taking inspiration from the great masters of the Italian Renaissance. He was one of the few artists permitted to sketch Lenin in his coffin, and later produced work to suit Socialist Realism. Though a supporter of the new government, Petrov-Vodkin did not produce overt propaganda; he painted in a figurative, realist style, often using symbols and mystical

elements. The positioning of subjects was important in his still-lifes, landscapes and portraits. He worked with the idea of a “spherical perspective”, depicting what the viewers could see in front of, behind and all around them. Petrov-Vodkin received critical acclaim, becoming the first president of the Union of Artists (previously the Association of Artists of Revolutionary Russia, AKhRR) and having a major retrospective in 1936-7. He was even invited to paint murals for the Palace of the Soviets, a commission that was never realised. He died from tuberculosis in 1939.



Kuzma Petrov-Vodkin

Still Life With a Herring, 1918
Oil on canvas, 56 x 88 cm

State Russian Museum, St Petersburg
Photo © 2017, State Russian Museum, St Petersburg



Kuzma Petrov-Vodkin

Beside Lenin's Coffin, 1924
Oil on canvas, 71 x 88.5 cm

State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow, Moscow
Photo © State Tretyakov Gallery

Pavel Filonov (1883-1941)

Pavel Filonov does not fit neatly into the categories of avant-garde or Socialist Realist, instead he invented a style he called "Analytical Realism". When he painted, he added to his subject little by little, "growing" his paintings like the process of growth in a living organism. The end result was an almost kaleidoscopic image made up of smaller, repeating elements. Filonov's approach was not well-received in the 1920s and 1930s, and he was encouraged by those around him to paint

commissions in the official Socialist Realist style, in order to survive. He continued to resist and he made paintings that were realistic in aesthetic but that did not conform to the doctrine of Socialist Realism. He insisted his 'ideology will find its own path...', and continued painting in his analytical realist style. He starved to death in the Siege of Leningrad in 1941.



Pavel Filonov
Heads (Human in the World), 1925-26
Oil on paper mounted on canvas, 109 x 72.7 cm

State Russian Museum, St Petersburg
Photo © 2017, State Russian Museum, St Petersburg



Pavel Filonov
Tractor Workshop at the Putilov Factory, 1931-32
Oil on canvas mounted on cardboard, 73 x 99 cm

State Russian Museum, St Petersburg
Photo © 2017, State Russian Museum, St Petersburg

Vasily Kandinsky (1866-1944)

Kandinsky was an extremely influential artist, known to have painted one of the first abstract paintings around 1910. Born in Russia, Kandinsky lived and worked in Moscow between 1914 and 1921. From 1896 to 1914, he lived in Munich, where he encountered the colours used in Impressionist, German Expressionist and Fauvist works and began to experiment with creating a "language" freed from figuration, capable of evoking ideas and emotions. The abstract artworks he produced were among the first of their kind. Motivated to leave Germany by the outbreak of the First World War, Kandinsky returned to Moscow. Kandinsky married

and attempted to reintegrate himself into Russian culture. The Russian authorities in the years immediately after the revolution encouraged him, as he was a successful artist by this point. In 1919, he founded the Institute of Artistic Culture in Moscow, which strove to determine the course of artistic experimentation in post-revolutionary Russia, and he set up new museums across the Soviet state. In 1922, disillusioned by the rise of Socialist Realism, Kandinsky moved back to Germany to teach at the Bauhaus in Weimar.



Wassily Kandinsky

Blue Crest, 1917
Oil on canvas, 133 x 104 cm

State Russian Museum, St Petersburg
Photo © 2017, State Russian Museum, St Petersburg

Marc Chagall (1887-1985)

Marc Chagall was born in Russia to a Lithuanian Jewish family. He left for France in 1912. He returned to Russia to visit his fiancée in 1914 and was prevented from leaving by the outbreak of the First World War. He settled there, painting exuberant, fantastical pieces, buoyed by the reunion with his wife Bella. While *Promenade*, 1917-18 is primarily about his wife, the work's optimism and spirit of freedom reflects his hopefulness about the Revolution. He was appointed Commissar for Art in 1918, and set up

a school in Vitebsk, inviting other artists (Malevich, El Lissitzky) to teach there with him. He revelled in the artistic freedom accompanying the Revolution, but his art revolved around depicting people, places, memories and emotions. Later, once the civil war took hold, living conditions worsened and some of the initial exuberance surrounding the revolution dissipated. Chagall moved to Moscow and then left Russia permanently in 1922, returning to France.



Marc Chagall

Promenade, 1917-18
Oil on canvas, 175.2 x 168.4 cm

State Russian Museum, St Petersburg
Photo © 2017, State Russian Museum, St Petersburg
Marc Chagall ® / © ADAGP, Paris and DACS, London 2017

Alexander Deineka (1899-1969)

Having originally trained as a graphic artist, Deineka often used bright colours and simplified form, focusing on the interplay between space and people. Deineka enjoyed success as an avant-garde painter in the 1920s. In the 1930s, he adopted Socialist Realism, depicting idealistic scenes of Soviet life in line with the Communist ideology.



Alexander Deineka

Race, 1932
Oil on canvas, 180 x 135

The Association of Historical and Regional Art, Tula
Photo © Provided with assistance from the State Museum and Exhibition Center ROSIZO.
The Association of Historical and Regional Art, Tula
© DACS 2017

Lyubov Popova (1889-1924)

One of the avant-garde Constructivists, Popova studied under Vladimir Tatlin. The new Communist society in Russia, demanded a new visual culture and the Constructivists, among others, sought to provide it. They saw fine art painting as a practice that was linked to the bourgeoisie. They still believed in the usefulness of artistic creativity but in the

necessity of applying it to concrete constructions and political messages. Popova described her painting, illustrated below, as one of a series of 'preparatory experiments for concrete materialised constructions'. Popova died in Moscow aged 35, of scarlet fever.



Lyubov Popova

Space-Force Construction, 1921
Oil, tessellation on plywood, 124 x 82.3 cm

State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow
Photo © State Tretyakov Gallery

Isaak Brodsky (1884-1939)

One of the leading Socialist Realists, Brodsky was known for painting revolutionary events and leaders of the Communist movement. He painted Lenin several times, even posthumously. He was a key member, alongside Boris Kustodiev and Konstantin Yuon, of the Association of Artists of Revolutionary Russia (AKhRR), which was set up in 1922. The same year the group staged at an exhibition called 'Paintings by Realist Artists to Help the Starving'.



Isaak Brodsky
Vladimir Lenin and a Demonstration, 1919
Oil on canvas, 90 x 135 cm

The State Historical Museum, Moscow
Photo © Provided with assistance from the State Museum and Exhibition Center ROSIZO.
The State Historical Museum, Moscow

Boris Mikhailovich Kustodiev (1878-1927)

Primarily a portraitist and painter, Kustodiev depicted mass demonstrations and workers in support of the revolution. As living conditions worsened and the initial euphoria dispersed, he soon began to criticize the regime, painting pieces such as *The Bolshevik*, 1920, a metaphor for the crude force that had risen over the country. He created designs for the State Porcelain Museum in St. Petersburg from 1923.

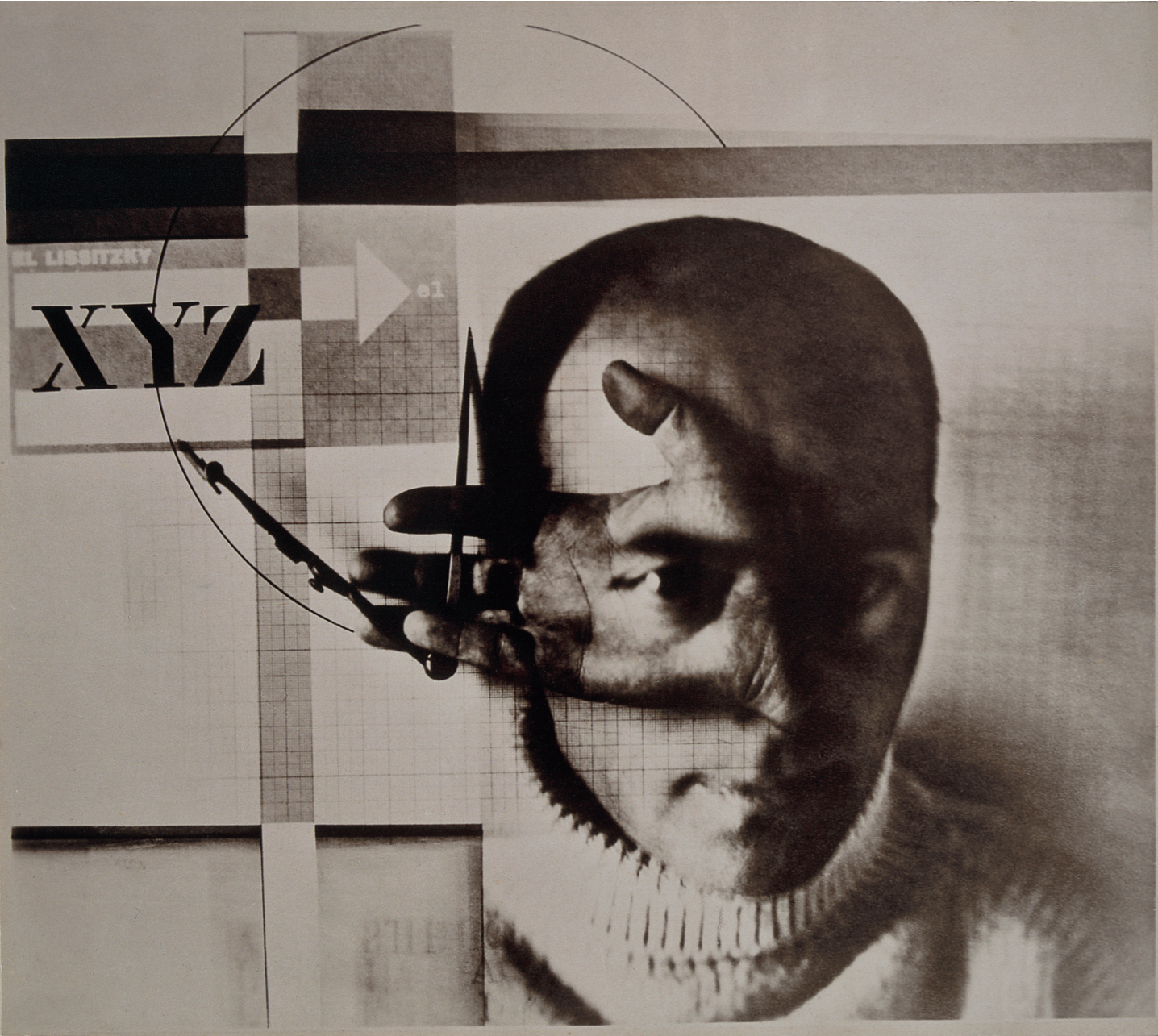


Boris Kustodiev
The Bolshevik, 1920
Oil on canvas, 101 x 140.5 cm

State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow
Photo © State Tretyakov Gallery

El Lissitzky (1890-1941)
A graphic designer and architect, El Lissitzky was influential in the birth of non-representational graphic art, as well as typography and advertising. He was born in Russia and after a period of travel in Germany and Europe in his late teens and early twenties, he returned to Moscow, due to the outbreak of war in 1914. In 1919, Marc Chagall invited El Lissitzky (along with Kazimir Malevich) to teach architecture and graphics at his school in Vitebsk, where El Lissitzky previously studied. Hugely influenced

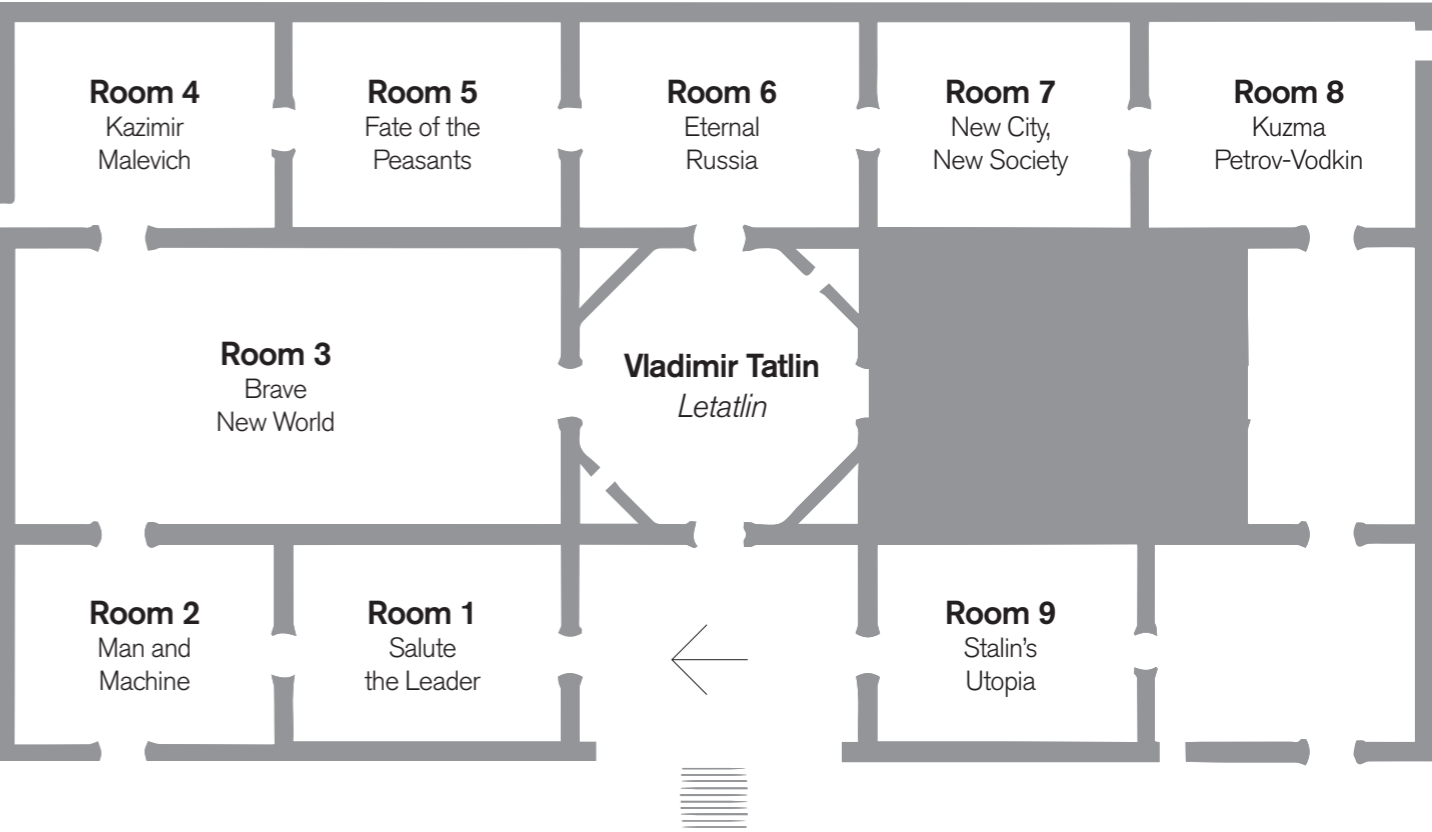
by Malevich, he became one of his most devoted followers, subscribing to the Suprematist idea of expressing pure feeling through graphic art. This brought about a monumental change in El Lissitzky's art and he began to create propaganda posters in support of the revolution. In the early 1920s he became involved with different art magazines and designed and published books, also starting to use photography in his practice.



El Lissitzky
Constructor [Self-Portrait with Dividers], 1924
Gelatine silver print, 26.3 x 29.5 cm

Alex Lachmann Collection, London
Photo © Collection Alex Lachmann

Plan of the Galleries



Worksheet

Ways of interpreting

	<div>Title</div> <div>Artist</div> <div>Medium</div> <div>Size</div>	<div>Title</div> <div>Artist</div> <div>Medium</div> <div>Size</div>
<div>Colour/shape/marks/line</div> <div>Primary/complementary</div> <div>Warm/cool/light/dark</div> <div>Sepia/black and white</div> <div>Thick/thin/long/short/expressive/direction</div>		
<div>Materials/surfaces</div> <div>Describe the use of materials and the texture of the surface.</div> <div>How has the work been made?</div> <div>Is the type of material important to the look and feel of the piece?</div> <div>What was the artist's intention?</div>		
<div>Composition/balance</div> <div>Describe the composition</div> <div>How are the elements arranged?</div> <div>Is there a focal point?</div> <div>Is there movement?</div> <div>Are elements repeated?</div>		
<div>Shape/scale</div> <div>Describe the shape of the artwork</div> <div>What is the scale of the artwork?</div>		

Content What is the work about? What questions is the work asking? Is it a story, a command or a challenge?		
Title/theme What does the artist call it? Does this change the way we see the work? Does it have a broader theme that links to other works?		
When/where/who When and where was the work made and why? Who was the work made for?		
Interpretation Does it relate to other works near it? What are key themes in this room?		

Need more information?

The RA Exhibition in Focus guide, an informative source of information about different artworks and themes in the exhibition is given out free at teacher events and school visits or workshops. You can also download it from the RA website.

The RA website exhibition page has links to related articles, resources and key images of artworks.

Why not check out the RA exhibition catalogue for this exhibition? Available to buy from the RA shop.