EXHIBITION GUIDE

EN

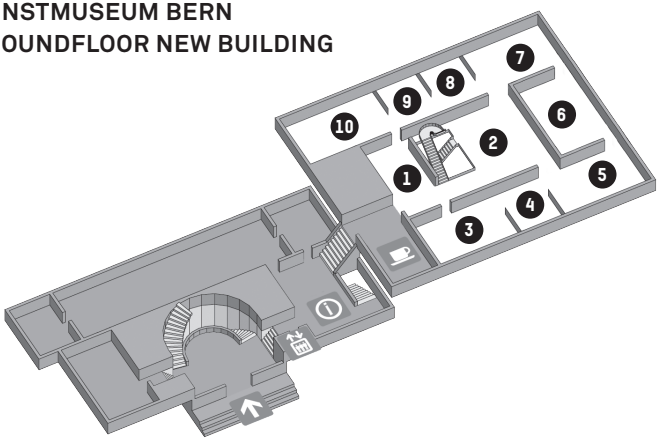
13.04. – 09.07.2017

THE REVOLUTION IS DEAD LONG LIVE THE REVOLUTION!

FROM DEINEKA TO BARTANA

KUNST MUSEUM BERN

FLOORPLAN
KUNSTMUSEUM BERN
GROUNDFLOOR NEW BUILDING



I. FROM REVOLUTIONARY ART TO SOCIALIST REALISM

1 Kazimir Malevich (1878 – 1935)
Political Posters 1920s and 1930s: Vera Adamovna Gitsevitch, Alexander Deineka, Gustav Klucis, Valentina Kulagina, Juri Pimenow, Natalja Pinus, Sergej Senkin

2 Samuel Adliwankin (1897 – 1966)
Mariya Bri-Beyn (1892 – 1971)
Alexander Deineka 1899 – 1969)
Alexander Gerasimow (1881 – 1963)
Juri Norstein (*1941)
Artavazd Peleshian (*1938)
Kusma Petrov-Vodkin (1878 – 1939)
Alexander Samokhvalov (1894 – 1971)
Vassili Svarog (1883 – 1946)

II. SOCIALIST REALISM IN EAST AND WEST GERMANY

3 Willli Sitte (1921 – 2013)
Wolfgang Mattheuer (1927 – 2004)
4 Lutz Dammbeck (*1948)
Kurt Tetzlaff (*1933)
Ulrich Weiss (*1942)
Cornelia Schleime (*1953)
5 Jörg Immendorf (1945 – 2007)
6 Martin Kippenberger (1953 – 1997)

III. IRONY AND NOSTALGIA IN SOTS ART

6 Erik Bulatov (*1933)
7 Ilya Kabakov (*1933)
Vitaly Komar/Alexander Melamid (*1943 / 1945)
Boris Mikhailov (*1938)
8 Ion Grigorescu (*1945), Jożef Robakowski (*1939)
9 Boris Mikhailov
10 Boris Mikhailov, Ilya Kabakov

INTRODUTION

To commemorate the 100-year anniversary of the Russian Revolution, Kunstmuseum Bern and the Zentrum Paul Klee are exploring the artistic legacy of the 1917 Revolution. While the exhibition in the Zentrum Paul Klee, in line with its subtitle 'From Malevich to Judd', is devoted to the after-effects of Russian avant-garde and the non-figurativ art as an artistic idea, the Kunstmuseum Bern, under the title 'From Deineka to Bartana', showing works of Socialist Realism and its legacy in contemporary art.

From a historical distance the question arises of how this world-changing events and its effects on art should be judged? How did the revolutionary social and political upheaval in Russia, preceded by an aesthetic revolution with the radically monochrome and non-representational *Black Square* by Kasimir Malevich (1915), lead to an artistic trend like Socialist Realism? How are we to understand this notorious artistic trend, which represented a totalitarian dictatorship and only became obsolete in 1991, with the collapse of the Soviet Union? What changed in the ideological postulate of truth in art? Is there any kind of art that is not ideologically appropriated and which could still claim today to be 'revolutionary'? These are the questions that inspired the idea behind the exhibition *The Revolution is dead. Long live the Revolution!*

The title of the exhibition, derived from the originally French proclamation 'The King is dead. Long live the King!', expresses the fundamental problem that any revolutionary upheaval is always followed by the next one. So even the Russian Revolu

tion of 1917 was heralded by many earlier revolutionary events. The contemporary relevance of the subject is backed up by the fact that the concept of revolution has received fresh impetus as a desire for actual upheavals in existing economic and social organisations over the last few years. Protests against social and economic inequality are proliferating all over the world, and new attention has been devoted to revolution within art, for example in the exhibition 'Soulèvements' (Paris 2016). But a closeness to the 'revolutionary' is innate even in art's claim to constant self-renewal.

In the year of the Revolution 1917 the urge to freedom led to an overthrow of the existing order, in which the population, with the help of the Bolsheviks, freed themselves from unjust social conditions and from their oppression by the Tsars. This was immediately followed by the formation of a government by revolutionary councils ('Soviets'), which represented a socialist alternative to the autocratic system. The way from revolutionary to socialist society was shaped in the end by the rapid progress of industrialisation. Russia's abrupt transition from agrarian country to industrial nation occurred via the mass appropriation of the population's land and possessions and the curtailment of civil rights. In the late 1920s, the collectivisation of land – the consolidation of small farms to become kolkhozy – was a disaster from which the country never recovered. Millions of families were driven from their homes and scattered over the whole of the Soviet Union. This Nomadic population became the labour force of the Soviet industrial revolution, filling the great cities, the building-sites and the labour camps of the Gulag.

At the same time the First Five-Year Plan (1928-1932) caused the greatest man-made famine until that time, in which almost eight million peasants lost their lives. On the basis of the teachings of Marx, Engels and Lenin, an entire nation was rebuilt. But this great transformation actually took a hundred years. It began in 1891, when the population first found itself on a collision course with the government of the Tsars, and ended in 1991 with the collapse of the Soviet regime.

I. FROM REVOLUTIONARY ART TO SOCIALIST REALISM

The tour of the exhibition first of all presents the formation of the canon. It begins with early Soviet works from the 1920s and 1930s, including posters by artists like **Juri Pimenov, Gustav Klucis** and **Valentina Kulagina**, with their utopian revolutionary calls to arms. In terms of painting, **Kazimir Malevich** is first in line. Having created a radically abstract work in 1915 with his *Black Square*, in his later work he returned to figurative painting. In the paintings of farm workers and peasants in his *Peasant Cycle* from the late 1920s, Malevich did incline thematically towards realistic motifs, in line with political demands, but stylistically he remained closer to abstract, 'suprematist' pictorial language.

The radical restructuring of society was accompanied by the deliberate use of artworks by the Party. It was the sole commissioner of art, which it attempted to use didactically for the creation of the new revolutionary society. The Soviet Powers required artists to be the loyal helpers of the Party in the Communist education of workers. Art was to be generally comprehensible and arouse enthusiasm, particularly since a high proportion the population was illiterate. In the years following the Revolution there were violent debates about the form and function of revolutionary, proletarian art. There was a great diversity of styles, but these were constantly restricted by Stalin's increasingly authoritarian regime. In 1932 the Central Committee of the Communist Party took control of national artistic production and demanded that all artists were to join the newly founded All Union of Soviet Artists. In 1934 writers defined the elements of Socialist Realism, which were to apply equally in the visual arts,

music and film. It was to be a 'revolutionary romanticism', which depicted reality as a 'revolutionary development' and educated people in the spirit of Communism. Stalin himself demanded that writers – and hence also visual artists – were to become 'engineers of the soul' to this end. The accepted expressive means were figurative painting and sculpture which depicted socialist themes in a realistic representational style. The most successful painters from the 1930s until the 1950s, such as **Alexander Deineka** and **Alexander Gerasimov**, were admired for works that depicted Soviet achievements and heroes such as peasants, workers, party leaders, whitewashed difficulties and visualised a Communist utopia. They expressed enthusiasm for Stalin's First Five-Year Plan and glorified the collectivisation of agriculture in scenes that hushed up the accompanying famine and other problems caused by it. Stylistically they borrowed from Russian artists of the 19th century, and strove for a realism in which a mixture of "Rembrandt, Rubens and Repin were put at the service of the working class" (Ivan Gronsky).

What becomes apparent when we look back at the art of Socialist Realism and its legacy are the countless ways in which political and aesthetic targets were quietly altered and subverted. In spite of great risks to the artists, doubts found a resonance in the works alongside Party doctrine.

As a complement and point of comparison to the programme of painted images, photographic and film works run through the exhibition. This begins with the early depictions of the Russian Revolution in the films of **Juri Norstein** and **Artavazd Peleshian**

(in the middle of the room), both of whom recall the events of the Revolution from a distance of fifty years. As well as demonstrating an outstanding mastery of film technique – animation and film essays – these artists reveal the early canonisation of Soviet historiography.

II. SOCIALIST REALISM IN EAST AND WEST GERMANY

The aesthetic of Socialist Realism is closely tied up with the Soviet value system. There must be an agreement between what is depicted and the moral values of society and the official Party line. The diktat of commitment to the Party and the people was policed by ideological and economic pressure, organisational controls and political campaigns. Socialist Realism is 'true' in so far as it reflects the 'truth' of the Party, since within the ideological system truth and reality coincide. This truth is both beauty and goal.

The further ideological and stylistic development of Socialist Realism happened in the German Democratic Republic from the 1960s until the 1980s. Selected works by **Willi Sitte** and **Wolfgang Mattheuer**, two of the most successful GDR artists, visualise the effort to show political desiderata and at the same to be the depiction of internal conflict situations, both in terms of the artist and to the sealed-off country. Through the successful technical appropriation of an individual style, whether it was Expressionistic, objective and veristic, surreal or baroque, a certain modernity was conveyed which also found acceptance in the west.

The GDR workers' films from the 1960s by **Ulrich Weiss** and **Kurt Tetzlaff** are early signs of the collision between theory and reality. They show the reality of the workers in a documentary style, but also the contradictions deliberately overlooked by the Party. They are complemented by a performance video by **Cornelia Schleime**, which she made just before she left for the west, and an animation film by **Lutz Dammbeck**, both of which reveal the restrictive and rigid nature of the spirit of the GDR at that time.

From here our eye moves westwards to the Federal Republic of Germany, where artists like **Jörg Immendorff** painted programmatic social pictures that were a reaction to Socialist Realism. As a devoted Maoist Immendorff demanded that artists engage with society, while **Martin Kippenberger** mocked painterly models from East and West. He used the great discrepancy with the west as a background for his ironic parodies, while in his disrespectful quotation of motifs and the realistic style he became an early herald of postmodernism.

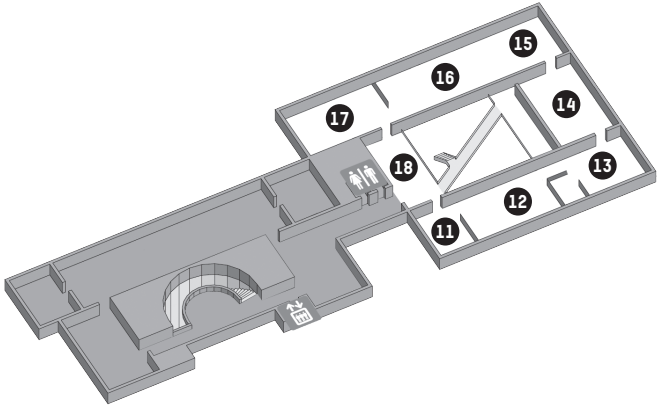
III. IRONY AND NOSTALGIA IN SOTS ART

One reason for the academic condemnation of Socialist Realism in Western art history may be sought in the fact that it has no way of reflecting critically upon itself, which is generally speaking the essence of modern art. But as a rule a critical attitude in Soviet society – and particularly in art – was seen as the opposite of solidarity and cohesiveness, and was avoided where possible. Soviet art criticism reprimanded works that demonstrated a style of their own and which, for example, foregrounded the artistic and technical process, wallowed in colours, or placed excessive emphasis on something in terms of either motif or form. Consequently artists generally avoided developing a deviant style. The impersonality and mediocrity of Socialist Realist style can therefore be seen as the 'successful' appropriation of the Party's vision.

The ideological alteration of Socialst Realism in the Federal Republic was followed in the Soviet Union in the 1970s and 1980s by the sarcasm of Sots Art, featuring protagonists such as **Erik Bulatov**, **Ilya Kabakov** and the artistic duo **Vitaly Komar** and **Alexander Melamid**, who parodied the Socialist pictorial world and at the same time visualised the hesitant political and ideological opening-up of the former Soviet Union in the form of Perestroika and Glasnost. The term Sots Art is based on the combination of 'Sotsrealism' (based on the English transcription of the Russian 'Soc') and Pop Art. Where Pop Art took as its subject western consumer society, Sots Art used the pictorial repertoire of Communist propaganda.

Boris Mikhailov started out capturing the everyday life of Soviet society using the media of photography. Even though the private use of cameras was no longer forbidden as it had been in the 1940s, taking photographs still represented a considerable risk. This makes the testimony of the series *Red* (1968-1975) (Room 7) all the more important, with its combination of private snapshots, officially staged scenes and fleeting observations. The series of works produced shortly before and shortly after the collapse of the Soviet Union, *Salt Lake* from 1986 (Room 9) and *At Dusk*, from 1993 (Room 10), as well as the shattering *Case History* (1997-98, First floor Room 12) look like archaeological explorations of a world that no longer exists. The critical questioning of the Soviet stagings of power was also a subject of the early video films of the Polish artist **Jozef Robakowski** and the Romanian **Ion Grigorescu** (Room 8).

FLOORPLAN
KUNSTMUSEUM BERN
FIRST FLOOR NEW BUILDING



IV. AFTER 1991: REVENGE ON THE SYSTEM AND ITS REPRESENTATION

11 Deimantas Narkevičius (*1964)
12 Boris Mikhailov
13 Jörg Herold (*1965)
14 Nicolas Cilins (*1985), Georg Baselitz (*1938)
15 Norbert Bisky (*1970)
16 Vladimir Dubossarsky/Aleksander Vinogradov (*1964/1963)

V. PROSPECT AND NEW UTOPIAS? THE ETERNAL RETURN

17 Yael Bartana (*1979)
18 Katarina Zdjelar (*1979

IV. AFTER 1991: REVENGE ON THE SYSTEM AND ITS REPRESENTATION

Ideological 'submissiveness' to the totalitarian system remains the problematic legacy of Socialist Realism. In the service of political goals it was deployed for a representation of reality that did not correspond to reality but instead created it. As we can see today in digital media, the dilemma continues to exist: realistic and documentary images shape the perception of reality, even though they are susceptible to manipulation, and hence not guarantees of the truth. **Jörg Herold** dismantles the heroic myths of the GDR on the one hand in his parody of the worker film and on the other in his investigations of the legends that were arising around the 'artistic hero' Joseph Beuys. In the work of **Deimantas Narkevičius** and **Nicolas Cilins** they turn into critical readings of their own biographies and cultural origins in the former Eastern Bloc states. This younger generation not only deconstructs the hegemonic claims of Western culture, but requires it to study and productively engage with Soviet art as the other side of the same coin.

After the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, it was not only a new generation of artists but also 'old masters' like **Georg Baselitz**, in his 'Russian paintings', who took their revenge on the ideologically freighted formerly revolutionary pictorial world. From the works of the Berlin artist **Norbert Bisky** to the scandalous large-format paintings of the Russian artistic duo **Vladimir Dubossarsky** and **Alexander Vinogradov**, attention was focused in many ways on the fact that of the social upheaval nothing remained but empty phrases. But thanks to their ideological character they retained

their validity as social critique. The visual formulae of Socialist Realism are changed into their opposite. Instead of the gloriously optimistic ultimate objective of Russian society as it then was, the obscene mockery in **Dubossarsky** and **Vinogradov**'s work cynically brings home failure and capitalist corruption.

V. PROSPECT AND NEW UTOPIAS? THE ETERNAL RETURN

The Israeli multi-media artist **Yael Bartana** goes a step further and, in her cultural revenant, the three-part film project *And Europe Will Be Stunned* (2007-2011) she visualizes the constant ideological control of art. While she elicits the public's euphoria, and delights them with the fictional return of the Jews to Poland, what dawns on the critical viewer and the wary watcher is that the artist avails herself of the same means as Socialist Realism.

General reflections on the nature of revolution subsequently provide viewers with food for thought: in her video *Everything Is Gonna Be* (2008), Serbian artist **Katarina Zdjelar** depicts the human need for comfort, which up to now has prevented further revolutions at least in Western welfare states – by having the members of a Norwegian amateur choir sing the Beatles song *Revolution*. The song introduced the political phase of John Lennon's career, and is presented as a dialogue between two individuals about the time around 1968. It addresses the relationship between revolution and violence, and between social transformation and political extremism. But just as the singers no longer quite capture the rhythm and the lyrics, their revolutionary energy has long since faded away.

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13.04. – 09.07.2017

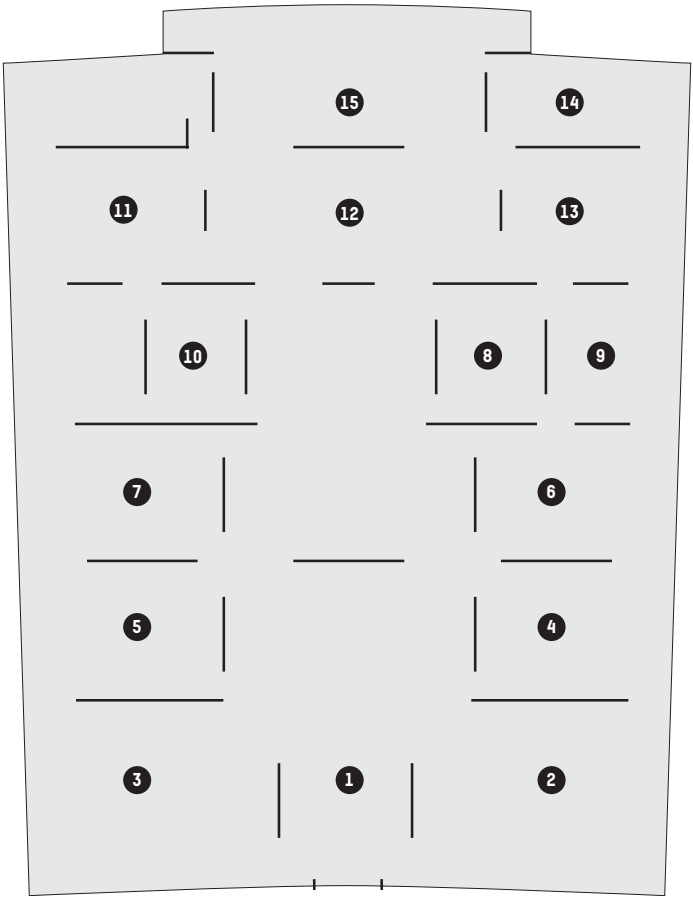
THE REVOLUTION IS DEAD LONG LIVE THE REVOLUTION!

FROM MALEWICH TO JUDD

Founded by
Maurice E. and Martha Müller
and the heirs of Paul Klee

Zentrum Paul Klee
Bern

FLOORPLAN
ZENTRUM PAUL KLEE



1. **RUSSIAN AVANT-GARDE** 1915 →
2. **SUPREMATISM** 1915 →
3. **CONSTRUCTIVISM** 1915 →
4. **BAUHAUS I** 1919 →
5. **BAUHAUS II** 1919 →
6. **DE STIJL** 1917 →
7. **ZURICH CONCRETE ART** 1936 →
8. **PHOTOGRAPHY**
9. **ABSTRACTION-CRÉATION** 1931 →
10. **LATIN AMERICAN AVANT-GARDE I** 1935 →
11. **LATIN AMERICAN AVANT-GARDE II** 1935 →
12. **RADICAL PAINTING** 1978 →
13. **MINIMAL ART** 1965 →
14. **BMPT** 1967 →
15. **DÜSSELDORF** 1964 →

INTRODUCTION

To commemorate the 100-year anniversary of the Russian Revolution, Kunstmuseum Bern and the Zentrum Paul Klee are exploring the artistic legacy of the 1917 Revolution. While the exhibition in the Zentrum Paul Klee, in line with its subtitle "From Malevich to Judd", is devoted to the after-effects of Russian avant-garde and non-figurativ art as an artistic idea, the Kunstmuseum Bern, under the title "From Deineka to Bartana", showing works of Socialist Realism and its consequences in the development of art until the present day.
The Revolution in October 1917 shook Russian society to its foundations. Centuries of Tsarist rule came to an end with the events of that great upheaval. In the visual arts athe Revolution began a few years previously. But the social and political significance of the arts were discussed in the spirit of the Revolution. The art of the Russian avant-garde was to penetrate every area of life and include painting, sculpture, architecture and design. The revolutionary works of the Russian Suprematists around Kazimir Malevich and El Lissitzky, as well as the Constructivists around Vladimir Tatlin and Alexander Rodchenko form the starting point of the exhibition. With selected positions, the consequences of this radically non-figurative art are traced throughout the 20th century. One immediate influence of the Russian avant-garde on the Constructivist movements in Europe in the 1920s and 1930s can be seen in the work of the Dutch artistic group De Stijl, in the Bauhaus and in Abstraction-Création in Paris. After the Second World War the Zurich Concrete artists and the artistic avant-garde in South America worked on the legacy of the Russian avant-garde. In parallel with the social upheavals of the 1960s, representatives of

Minimal Art in New York, the BPMT group in Paris and students of Joseph Beuys in Düsseldorf made radically non-figurative art. Using minimalist resources such as a reduced pictorial language and industrial materials, they position themselves against a traditional concept of art. Rodchenko's monochrome paintings underwent a re-interpretation in the Radical Painting of the 1970s and 1980s.

1 **RUSSIAN AVANT-GARDE** 1915 →

In October 1917 subversive energies discharged themselves through the form of political revolution. The change shaped social structures with lasting effect. In the field of art, the Revolution had been heralded years before. Since 1905, the first Russian Revolution, the Russian avant-garde had been influenced by western art: by Cubism and Futurism, for example. These made their appearance in Russian artistic trends such as Cubo-Futurism and Rayonism. Alongside Ivan Puni and Lyubov Popova, Kazimir Malevich was one of the most important representatives of Cubo-Futurism. In 1915, for the first time, Russia broke away completely from the shadow of its Western European models. Genuinely Russian artistic trends came into being in the form of Suprematism and Constructivism. The works of artists like Malevich, Vladimir Tatlin and Alexander Rodchenko show this new way towards a completely non-representational world. In the first years of its existence the Bolshevik Party showed great respect to the artists who rejected the old bourgeois artistic doctrine with their designs. Their revolutionary art was now to become the art of Revolution. Many artists were given teaching posts at the restructured art colleges around the country. For the first time in history of art of the modern age an artistic transformation occurred in the reverse direction, from East to West. The abrupt end came in 1932, when all art associations were banned on Stalin's orders, and art societies could only be founded under the auspices of the Party. Over the years that followed, Russian emigrants like El Lissitzky, Naum Gabo, Antoine Pevsner and Vasily Kandinsky chiefly encountered artists of the European avant-garde in Berlin.

❷ **SUPREMATISM** 1915 →

In the early 1910s Malevich was considered to be one of the Cubo-Futurists. In 1915 he painted the *Black Square* and moved radically away from all earlier models. The turning point in the art of the Russian avant-garde came with the *Last Futurist Exhibition of Paintings 0,10* which was held in Petrograd in 1915–1916. Thirteen other artists took part in this group exhibition organized by Malevich. The *Black Square* had pride of place, and hung where the icon usually hangs in Russian-Orthodox houses. With the exhibition and the *Black Square* he wanted to take the visual arts back to its origins, and created one of the most important icons in the art of the 20th century. He called this new form of art Suprematism, from the Latin "supremus", the highest or most important. Malevich freed colour from content, because for him it had an energy of its own. His vocabulary was restricted to a few forms such as square, circle and cross. Out of this Suprematist alphabet the "new painterly realism" was constructed. Suprematism was supposed to give expression pure sensation rather than depict figurative nature. Unlike the Constructivists, Suprematism considered any instrumentalisation of art, for social or political interests, for example, to be wrong. El Lissitzky worked, like Malevich, at Vitebsk Art College. From 1919, with *Proun* (project for the affirmation of the new) he brought Suprematist ideas into three-dimensional space, giving the works an architectural quality.

3 **CONSTRUCTIVISM** 1915 →

The new line of Bolshevist cultural policy, which saw the creation of the People's Commissariat for Education only a short time after the October Revolution, initially encouraged the avant-garde and saw the new art as a means of cultural education and a reshaping of society. Over the next few years, as well as Malevich, Lissitzky, Tatlin, Rodchenko, Vasily Kandinsky and Marc Chagall held posts at the new art schools in Moscow, Petrograd and Vitebsk. The question of the social relevance of art was posed with unfamiliar urgency, and led finally to the demand "to create and build thousands of useful objects". This appeal contradicted Malevich's claim that art should not be oriented towards usefulness and functionality. Tatlin and Rodchenko went on to distance themselves from Suprematism, and redefined the artist's role in revolutionary society by stressing material, technique and functionality and associating it with the demand that the new art should have a direct function. The break with Suprematism in Malevich's sense represented the birth of Constructivism. In their 1920 *Realistic Manifesto*, Naum Gabo and his brother Antoine Pevsner presented Constructivism as a synthesis of art, science and technology. Vladimir Tatlin had been working since 1913 on abstract assemblages of material, the *Counter-Reliefs*. In these he freed form from content, and in his *Corner-Counter-Reliefs* went even further in freeing art from its support and bringing it into three-dimensional space. These ideas would point the way for the artists of both De Stijl and the Bauhaus.

4 **BAUHAUS I** 1919 →

The state Bauhaus was founded by the architect Walter Gropius in 1919. The term "Bauhaus" referred to the builders' huts of the Middle Ages, in which all craftsmen worked together in a social and spiritual community. Art and craft were also to go hand in hand and stimulate one another. These principles were very close to those of the Russian avant-garde, particularly with ideas about the task of art in a socialist society. Gropius knew these ideas through his contact with the Russian People's Commissariat for Education, magazines and other publications. With the Higher Artistic and Technical Workshops founded by Stalin in 1920, a kind of Russian Bauhaus was created.
The first teachers at the Bauhaus included the Swiss artist Johannes Itten. He studied with Adolf Hölzel at Academy of Art in Düsseldorf. Hölzel's design theory was based around elementary forms such as the circle, the triangle and the square, contrasts of light and dark and complementary colours. Itten's work was based on an intuitive approach rather than a purely constructive one. Other Bauhaus masters such as Paul Klee and Kandinsky picked up Constructivist elements of design. Kandinsky lived in Russia between 1914 and 1922, and ran the Institute of Artistic Culture in Moscow, which brought him into contact with many protagonists of the Russian avant-garde. Kandinsky still used an intuitive approach. From the late 1920s Paul Klee engaged with his theory of planimetry and stereometry. Construction studies also appeared in his artistic work of this time: He constructed three-dimensional forms with sticks and rubber bands and drew them. But he distanced himself from a purely constructive approach in which intuition played no part.

5 **BAUHAUS II** 1919 →

In 1922 Hungarian Bauhaus students set up the KURI Group (constructive utilitarian rational international). They were soon joined by other artists such as Peter Keler and Otto Umbehr. With their ideas of a rapprochement between art and technology as well as concentration on the constructive they came close to the positions of the Russian Constructivists. After some members had attended Theo van Doesburg's De Stijl course at the Bauhaus, they distanced themselves from what they saw as the spiritualist and esoteric basic course of Johannes Itten. This helped to a great extent to give the Bauhaus a new direction: it moved away more and more from the intuitive approach towards construction, functionality and technology, with the motto "Art and technology – a new unity!" The Bauhaus in Dessau (from 1926 on) concentrated increasingly on architecture and the design of industrial products. Two architects followed Gropius as directors: in 1928 the Swiss Hannes Meyer, and in 1930 Mies van der Rohe. The Hungarian László Moholy-Nagy taught at the Bauhaus from 1923. He was familiar with the *Realistic Manifesto*, and was particularly influenced by its ideas on kinetics and balance, which he referred to in his 1989 book *From Material to Architecture*. Artists such as Max Burchartz, Walter Dexel and Erich Buchholz were influenced by the design principles of the Bauhaus and by De Stijl, and in this way were drawn to Constructivist concepts of form and colour. Through former Bauhaus students and teachers the design ideas of the Bauhaus spread to various countries. In 1933, for example, the Bauhaus teacher Josef Albers moved to the USA, where he taught at Black Mountain College. From 1937 Moholy-Nagy ran the New Bauhaus in Chicago. The ideas of the Bauhaus reached Switzerland with the Bauhaus student Max Bill.

6 **DE STIJL** 1917 →

The De Stijl group was set up in 1917, in parallel with the artistic developments in Russia. In Leiden in 1917 the Dutch painters Theo van Doesburg and Piet Mondrian set up the magazine *De Stijl* (the style). Which became the mouthpiece of the group. The Dutch term "nieuwe beelding" (new design) was translated as "neoplasticism". Van Doesburg was a part of the Dada movement, and gave private courses at the Bauhaus in Weimar between 1921 and 1923. Alongside painters like van Doesburg, Mondrian, Georges Vantongerloo and Friedrich Vordemberge-Gildewart, the members included architects and designers such as Gerrit Rietveld. In the 1930 manifesto *Concrete art* van Doesburg writes: "A plane, on the other hand, is a plane, a line a line, no more and no less..." The goal was a geometric abstraction free of references to natural forms and free of any representational function. The means of their purely abstract formal language were reduced to elementary design principles which were reduced to the primary colours and black white and grey, and to horizontal and vertical alignments. They sought to achieve the most objective design possible, free from any individual self-expression. In the connection between painting, sculpture and architecture they sought the transposition of the Gesamtkunstwerk. Different artistic ideas soon led to conflicts within the group, which split in 1925. Unlike Mondrian, van Doesburg extended the means of design to the diagonal, and was no longer restricted to the primary colours. The group dissolved in 1931, with the death of van Doesburg.

7 **ZURICH CONCRETE ART** 1936 →

In Switzerland in the 1930s, with its centre in Zurich, many artists were influenced by the Russian avant-garde, De Stijl and the Bauhaus. One particularly important impulse was the design ideas of the Bauhaus, where notions of elementary art came together with ideas of social reform. Swiss artists like Max Bill and Hans Fischli, later director of the College of Applied Arts in Zurich, studied at the Bauhaus in Dessau. The group of Zurich Concrete artists included artists like Max Bill, Camille Graeser, Verena Loewensberg and Richard Paul Lohse. They came together in the 1930s and worked until the 1950s according to the ideas of the group. Bill took the term "concret" from van Doesburg's manifesto *Art concrete.* The basic ideas also came from van Doesburg: Abstract art is not an abstraction of nature, but creates a reality of its own out of form and colour. The attempt to systematise and objectivise design is the crucial contribution of the Zurich artists to the further development of abstract art to constructivist art. Max Bill wrote: "I distinguish between whether something only looks like a construction, or whether it is actually a construction whose elements are demonstrable."
The Zurich group's use of the composition techniques of the Russian avant-garde is particularly apparent in typography, advertising art and poster design: Letters and words leave the central axis and the horizontal direction of reading, the arrangements of planes become asymmetrical and assume a diagonal alignment. Photomontage and collage are also used as techniques.

8 PHOTOGRAPHY

In the early years of the 20th century photography was still seen as being in competition with painting, and attempted to emulate it. It was not until the 1920s that photography emancipated itself, with experimental photographers exploring the possibilities of the technique and attempting to apply it to their own design ideas. Artists like Alexander Rodchenko and László Moholy-Nagy made a considerable contribution to this. From 1924 Rodchenko devoted himself almost exclusively to photography. In his portraits and architectural photographs he used surprising and unusual perspectives. Rodchenko taught at the Higher Artistic and Technical Workshops, where he disseminated the technique of photography as an artistic medium.
Called to the Bauhaus in 1923, Moholy-Nagy was most important in the introduction of photography to the Bauhaus, and was seen as a pioneer of experimental photography. In 1925 he published the Bauhaus book *Painting. Photography. Film*. He saw a great potential in technical methods of representation such as film and photography, and believed that these techniques could supplant painting. Through the use of photography, his ideal was transposed to design reduced to elementary means without subjective influences. In this way he communicated the ideas of the Dada movement as well as those of the Russian Constructivists. The Brazilian Geraldo de Barros was a pioneer of photography in Brazil. As a member of the group Ruptura (break) he made considerable contributions to the further development of photography in Brazil. He developed his experimental photographs with multiple exposure, rotation, cut-up and collage. He alienated objects and buildings with this method in such a way as to produce abstract pictorial constructions.

9 **ABSTRACTION-CRÉATION** 1931 →

The artists' association Abstraction-Création was formed in Paris in 1931 from the earlier groups Cercle et Carré and Art Concret, and partly on the initiative of Theo van Doesburg. The members of the association included at times over a hundred artists from many different countries, including artists like Hans Arp, Sophie Taeuber-Arp, van Doesburg, Albert Gleizes, Jean Hélion, Auguste Herbin, František Kupka, Anton Pevsner and Georges Vantongerloo. The group published the journal *abstraction – création – art non figuratif*. In their statutes it said that "The goal of his association is to organize exhibitions of non-figurative art (generally called Abstract Art), that is of works which show neither a copy nor an interpretation of nature".

In this sense Abstraction-Création can be seen above all as a platform for artists working with abstraction or non-figurative art. Together they organized publications and exhibitions, and engaged in publicity work. Abstract art was on the defensive, and had to defend itself – particularly in France – against such widespread artistic trends as Surrealism. The ideological and artistic origins of the artists were very different. They referred to predecessors such as Constructivism, Concrete Art, Neo-plasticism, but also to Cubism. In the name of the association this is made clear: on the one hand abstraction is the start-ing-point, a progressive abstraction from forms in nature. On the other it is about creation, the invention of images from a purely geometrical conception using abstract elements such as line and plane.

⑩ LATIN AMERICAN AVANT-GARDE I 1935 →

One of the most important figures behind abstract geometrical art in South America was Joaquín Torres-Garcia. In 1934 the founder member of the Parisian artist's group Cercle et Carré returned to his homeland of Uruguay, where he founded the group Asociación de Arte Constructivo and formulated his concept of "universal Constructivism" . With this he sought to achieve a synthesis between European modern art and the pre-Columbian art of South America, as well as involving all aspects of life. His understanding of art as a political and social force was also influential on his work.
Tomás Maldonado became acquainted with the European artists' groups through Torres-García. As well as the Parisian groups, Mondrian and van Doesburg, the Bauhaus and the Zurich Concrete artists became central reference points. In Buenos Aires in 1944 Maldonado founded the artists' group Asociación Arte Concreto Invención, whose members also joined the Argentinian Communist Party. In the spirit of the Russian avant-garde, the artists' group attributed a social role to art, as the communicator of a political vision and an instrument for shaping the real world. Geometrical order symbolised a new social order, which was to be collectively and rationally structured. One of the members, Gyula Kosice, published the journal *Arturo. Revistas de Artes Abstractas*. This journal marked the start of Concrete Art in South America. Kosice was also a founder member of the artists' group Arte Madí. The approach of Arte Madí was more playful and imaginative, and its members worked increasingly with three-dimensional objects.

⓫ LATIN AMERICAN AVANT-GARDE II 1935 →

Waldemar Cordeiro founded the Ruptura (break) group in São Paolo in 1952. It represented a rigorous and intellectual direction in Concrete Art and was at first strictly mathematical in inspiration. Against the background of the country's industrial boom, Cordeiro took an increasing interest in the principles of the Russian avant-garde and the Bauhaus, aimed at ensuring that art made a practical contribution to society.
In Rio de Janeiro Lygia Clark and Hélio Oiticica were involved in the foundation of the group Frente (front). Oiticica was very interested in the works of Mondrian and Malevich. The members of the Frente group followed abstract geometrical and Constructivist concepts, but with their interactive sculptures they reached an extended concept of art which overcame the restriction of the perception of art to the visual and included physical experience. Clark and Oiticica were also representatives of the neo-concrete movement influenced by the Arte Madí group, which numbered Pevsner, Bill, Josef Albers and Malevich among its members. The movement turned against the rationalist art represented by Ruptura, and designed a new concept of the art object by advocating an existential essentiality in art which was perceivable to the senses.
Also active in Brazil from 1949 onwards was the Swiss emigré artist Mira Schendel, who worked with abstract-constructivist formal elements. Like Schendel, Gego (Gertrud Louise Goldschmidt) was not a member of any group. She lived in Venezuela, and turned in the 1950s to three-dimensional works which were also highly influenced by the Bauhaus and Russian Constructivism.

⓬ **RADICAL PAINTING** 1978 →

In 1978 Marcia Hafif wrote the essay *Beginning Again* for the art magazine *Artforum*. In her article she discusses contemporary painting in the art history of the 20th century, not least in the context of the Russian avant-garde. Hafif's essay sparked discussions among painters in New York and led to regularly meetings in her studio, group exhibitions and publications. One highlight – and at the same time the end of the group – was the 1985 show *Radical Painting*. As the title of her piece suggests, Hafif addressed the often invoked end of painting, and at the same time made it clear that some painters were risking a new start. According to Hafif it had become necessary to turn inwards, to turn towards the media of art, the materials and techniques with which art is created. In 1920, with the three monochrome paintings Rodchenko wanted to take painting "to its logical ending". Consequently, in post-revolutionary Russia he turned his attention to production art. In contrast to this, at a time when the end of art was once more under discussion, artists in New York recognised monochrome painting as an opening to new painterly investigations. They were, like Malevich, concerned with the essence of painting. With questions of how and not of what. With questions directed at the essential core of painting. The painting represented nothing, it was no longer abstraction, it was simply painting. But each artist used monochrome painting in a different way.

⓭ **MINIMAL ART** 1965 →

The art of the Russian avant-garde was only discovered in America through publications and exhibitions throughout the 1960s. At the same time a group of artists in New York developed an equally radically non-representational art, even though at that point they had not yet engaged in any depth with the artistic goals of the Russian avant-garde. Art was to be freed completely from the representational function, from symbolism and illusionism. Like the Suprematists, the Minimalist artists avoided any forms of individual, gestural or emotional expression. Instead, their radically non-figurative art was to serve a universal idea. They avoided compositions with hierarchically arranged elements, and used the most neutral, industrial materials possible. Artists like Donald Judd and Dan Flavin designed objects in Plexiglas, metal or neon tubes, which Judd described as "specific" because the objects looked like the selected material. This material did not present itself as anything but what it was. Roughly speaking, the common features between Minimal Art and the Russian avant-garde can be traced back to the radical reduction, directness and concreteness of their works. To quote Frank Stella: "What you see is what you see." The material, form and colour of the art works do not represent or symbolise anything. They are the art work. Like Malevich, who was attempting to get "towards zero" or even "beyond zero" and turning away from academic art, the Minimal artists wanted to create something completely new through the reduction of form.

⓮ **BMPT** 1967→

In 1967 Daniel Buren, Olivier Mosset, Michel Parmentier and Niele Toroni – described by critics as BMPT – exhibited together several times in Paris. The four artists had met before their first group exhibition, visited each other's studios and discussed the situation of art. They were united by an extremely impersonal visual language: Buren painted beige vertical stripes on white fabric, Mosset painted black circles on white canvas, Parmentier sprayed horizontal stripes on folded fabric and Toroni placed dabs of paint at regular 30-centimetre intervals. After countless discussions they decided henceforth to perform all their actions communally. What was in the foreground was no longer the action of the individual, but that of the collective. In their opinion the value of painting did not depend on representation, expression or authorship. Three further collective "manifestations" were held before differences of opinion between the artists became unbridgeable. Even though the discussions among the four artists were not principally concerned with the political situation, they did support the cause of the revolutionaries of Paris in 1968. And while they never referred directly to the Russian avant-garde, like the Russians they used radical non-representational visual language to defend themselves against the prevailing visual tradition, which was characterized in Paris at the time by gestural, subjective informal painting. Like Malevich they reduced painting to its object-like, material quality.

⓯ **DÜSSELDORF** 1964 →

In 1964 Imi Giese and Imi Knoebel decided to study with Joseph Beuys at the Academy of Art in Düsseldorf. They were more interested in Beuys' radical attitude than his art-political actions. The young men had previously discovered Malevich's book *The Non-Objective World* and were fascinated by the Russian's artistic attitude and severe visual language. Convinced that they had little talent, the artists saw Malevich's *Black Square* as a creative approach that didn't require any special gift. Malevich's tendency towards zero, which was often taken as heralding the end of art, formed the starting point of the students' artistic discoveries. Rather than showing and discussing works in Beuys's class, they demanded a room of their own for their experiments. In Room 19, which they shared for a short time with Blinky Palermo among others, the first works by Imi Knoebel were produced, consisting of line paintings and fibre-glass plates. Later Knoebel, like his friend Giese, worked with transitions from plane to space and vice versa. Giese, like Charlotte Posenenske, saw his works as open sculptures whose arrangement could be varied and also extended within the system. Their fellow-student Blinky Palermo was also inspired by the severity of the Russian models, but he avoided their seriousness in favour of a playful treatment of forms and colours. Palermo began stitching together paintings from fabric that he found in the store-room. He stopped painting forms, and from now on the colours were the forms. There was no such thing as a hierarchical composition in which colours served forms.

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