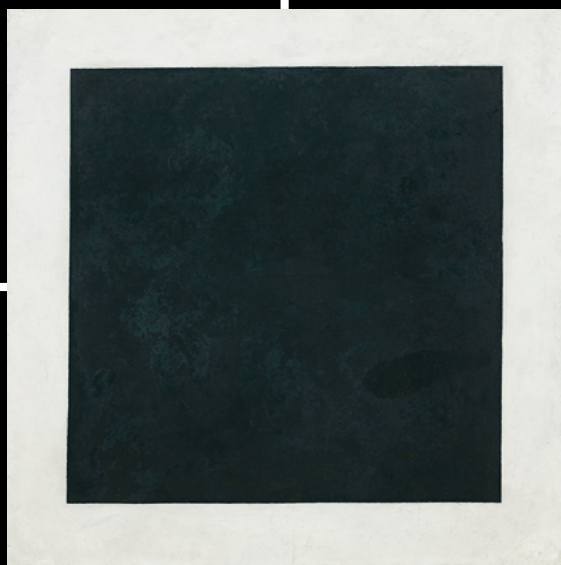


Square and
Space



From Malevich
to GES-2

In this exhibition, two stories unfold in parallel. The first is about how the creative space spills out from a small square canvas to fill a building the size of the House of Culture. The second story, even more important, is that of the relation between the work of art and the viewer over the last century and a half, during which masterpieces ceased to play the leading role. Displaced from the centre of attention to the periphery, they have become optional backgrounds for self-assertion, frames for selfies.

Unlike the Russian *kvadrat*, the English word “square” has two meanings—one geometric, the other urbanistic. With the invention of the QR code, the geometric square—the most celebrated version of which in art is undoubtedly Kazimir Malevich’s *Black Square*—has come to contain vast amounts of information (“infinite and eternal,” as Malevich said of his canvas, which, in fact, is far from black, and not, strictly speaking, a square). The urban square, on the other hand, has only become more emptied with the passing of time, due, in part, to the preference of our contemporaries for online communication, at home on their smartphones.

Square and Space unites these two meanings of the word “square,” inviting visitors to observe how the canvas that heralded the end of painting more than a hundred years

ago came, paradoxically, to serve as a stimulus for further artistic discoveries. A stroll through the twelve sections of this exhibition provides an opportunity to see how colour and light, form and construction, representations of the city and of man in the art of the past and the present were transformed—directly or indirectly—by a single small black square on a white background, and how, in parallel, art was transformed from a quadrangle on a wall into an installation space that draws viewers in. The sections of this exhibition are only some of the possible paths through the art of the last two centuries, at the intersections of which artists from different times and countries meet.

The artists featured in this exhibition responded both to the idea of the solitary revolutionary calling for the destruction of the museum as a phenomenon and to the technological revolution that allowed this dream of the Avant-garde to come true: the contemporary museum has dissolved into a welcoming space full of light that bears hardly any resemblance to the museums that preceded it. Encountering works of art, the modern public of flâneurs now often interprets them not as traditional exhibits but as amusing artefacts, backdrops against which to photograph themselves.

Malevich foretold such changes in art, the museum, and viewers at the beginning of the twentieth century. Exactly a hundred years later, the Italian architect Renzo Piano conceived of the transformation of GES-2 power station into GES-2 House of Culture in a way that brought out this anthropological shift. Through his reconstruction, Piano sought to answer the question posed by Malevich's

painting: for whom and for where is art made? Each exhibit in *Square and Space* proposes its own answer, and each visitor—whether they are an enthusiastic viewer, a flâneur, or just a person with a selfie camera—will find something for themselves here. Most likely, the impressions of every person will differ from those of others, perhaps even contradict them—but is revealing the beauty of the contradictions on which culture has stood since time immemorial not the best possible outcome of any exhibition?

Prologue

Artists and authors:
 Ivan Aivazovsky
 Thierry de Cordier
 Robert Fludd
 Arkhip Kuindzhi
 Pablo Picasso
 Illarion Pryanishnikov
 Laurence Sterne
 Oleg Vassiliev

The *Square and Space* exhibition is a roll call of the most important names in the art of the twentieth century, both Russian and international: among the works exhibited here are Gerhard Richter's metaphysical *Candle* (1982), Pablo Picasso's cubist masterpiece the *Portrait of Ambroise Vollard* (1910), and a 1923 authorial reproduction of *Black Square*, the most important work by the founder of Suprematism, Kazimir Malevich, who owed much to Picasso, but went far further in his radicalism, seeing beyond the artistic possibilities of his epoch. *Study for a Portrait* (1953) by Francis Bacon—the artist who led post-war European art to new horizons and revealed the hidden essence of humankind—is also brought into dialogue with Picasso's *Portrait*.

This begs the question: why was it specifically in Russia—a country that had remained faithful to the realist tradition and never aspired to supremacy in world art—that Suprematism and other variants of non-objective art emerged at the start of the twentieth century? A possible answer is to be found in seemingly well-studied artists of the second half of the nineteenth century—Ivan Aivazovsky, Arkhip Kuindzhi, Illarion Pryanishnikov. To an attentive gaze, their works reveal the striving to express the inexpressible, to convey a feeling of the endlessness of the Universe and of the metaphysical essence of nature and humankind that has always been a hallmark of Russian art. The canvases of Aivazovsky and Kuindzhi are striking in their minimalism and clear leaning towards non-objectivity long before the appearance of the movement itself. Their works are complemented by Oleg Vassiliev's *Silence* (2002), which plunges the viewer into the infinity of all things, and by Thierry De Cordier's *North Sea no. 2.2* (2013), which raises the very same questions that had run through Aivazovsky's *Black Sea* (1881) in the twenty-first century.



1

1 Gerhard Richter (b. 1932)
Candle, 1982. Oil on canvas. 80×65 cm.
Collection of V–A–C Foundation

2 Pablo Picasso (1881–1973)
Portrait of Ambroise Vollard, 1910. Oil on
canvas. 92×66 cm. The Pushkin State
Museum of Fine Arts



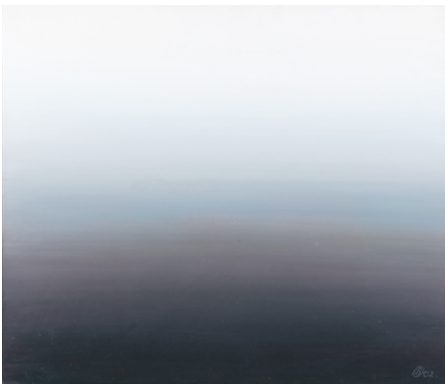
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5

3 Illarion Pryanishnikov (1840–1894)
Pot of Shared Offerings on a Patronal Feast, 1888. Oil on canvas.
114 × 185 cm. Saratov Radishchev State Art Museum

4 Arkhip Kuindzhi (1842–1910)
Landscape. Steppe, 1890–1895. Oil on canvas. 33 × 61 cm. The State Tretyakov Gallery. Bequeathed by Zinaida Nortsova in 1995

5 Oleg Vassiliev (1931–2013)
Silence, 2002. Oil on canvas.
50 × 70 cm. ART4 Museum

6



6 Ivan Aivazovsky (1817–1900)
The Black Sea (A Storm Begins to Whip Up in the Black Sea), 1881. Oil on canvas. 149×210 cm. The State Tretyakov Gallery. From the collection of Pavel Tretyakov

7 Thierry De Cordier (b. 1954)
North Sea no. 2.2, 2013. Oil on wood. 208×116 cm. Collection of V–A–C Foundation

7

The path to *Black Square*

Artists:

Kazimir Malevich
Pablo Picasso
Nikolai Suetin

The idea of a black square first came to Malevich in his sketches of the sets for Mikhail Matiushin and Alexei Kruchenykh's futurist opera *Victory over the Sun* (1913). Through an interaction of atonal music, "transrational" text, and cubo-futuristic set design, an attempt was made in this opera to imagine an imminent inverted world in which the Sun—the symbol of the existing order of things—had been overthrown. As the Malevich scholar Irina Vakar has written, "the idea of the opera (possibly unconsciously for its authors) took the theme of nihilistic revolt to a new, truly global level."^{*}

The *Black Square* itself was painted in the autumn of 1915 and first presented alongside forty Suprematist canvases by Malevich at the *Last Futurist Exhibition of Paintings 0.10* in Petrograd.

The emergence of Suprematism was preceded by an assimilation of the most important artistic concepts of the turn of the century, from Symbolism to Futurism. In 1910, Sergei Shchukin had opened his private collection to visitors in Moscow, and from that point on it had been possible for Russian artists to acquaint themselves with the masterpieces of Cézanne, of the Impressionists and Fauvists, of Matisse and Picasso.

This section of *Square and Space* brings two of the most important figures in the art of the twentieth century into dialogue. Following in the footsteps of Picasso (*Tenor and Violin*, 1913), Malevich searched for new modes of expression: the compositions he called "alogist" are filled with details, signs, annotations, numbers, and coloured geometric planes in at times absurd combinations. These works reflect the incredible changes brought about by technological progress as well as the new tempo and rhythm of life (*Aviator*, 1914). As his conception of art gradually evolved, Malevich took the deciding step towards a new artistic reality—the construction of a modern cosmos through an exit "beyond zero form." The divine infant—the *Black Square*—was born.

* *Vakar I.* Kazimir Malevich. Chernyj kvadrat [Kazimir Malevich. Black Square]. Moscow, State Tretyakov Gallery Publ., 2020. P. 10.

8

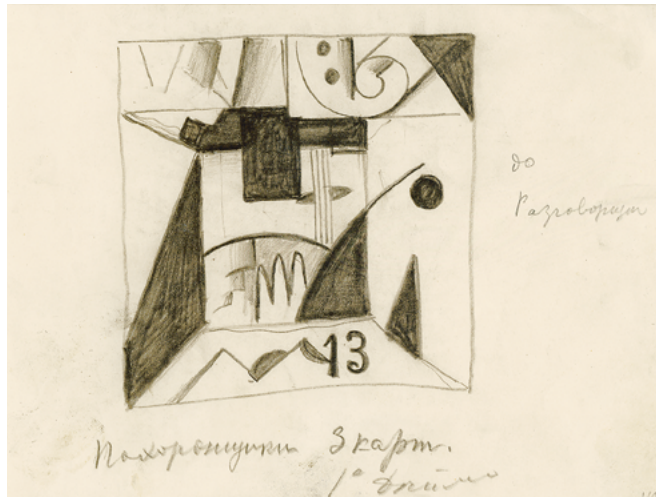


9

8 Kazimir Malevich (1879–1935)
The New One. Costume design for the opera *Victory over the Sun* by Mikhail Matiushin and Aleksei Kruchenykh, 1913. Italian pencil, watercolour, ink, and brush on paper. 26.2 × 21.2 cm. Saint Petersburg State Museum of Theatre and Music

9 Kazimir Malevich (1879–1935)
The Squabbler. Costume design for the opera *Victory over the Sun* by Mikhail Matiushin and Aleksei Kruchenykh, 1913. Paper, Italian pencil, watercolour. 26.7 × 21 cm. Saint Petersburg State Museum of Theatre and Music

10 Kazimir Malevich (1879–1935)
Set design sketch for the opera Victory over the Sun by Mikhail Matiushin and Aleksei Kruchenykh. Act 1, Scene 3, 1913. Italian pencil on paper. 17.7 × 22.2 cm. Saint Petersburg State Museum of Theatre and Music



10



11

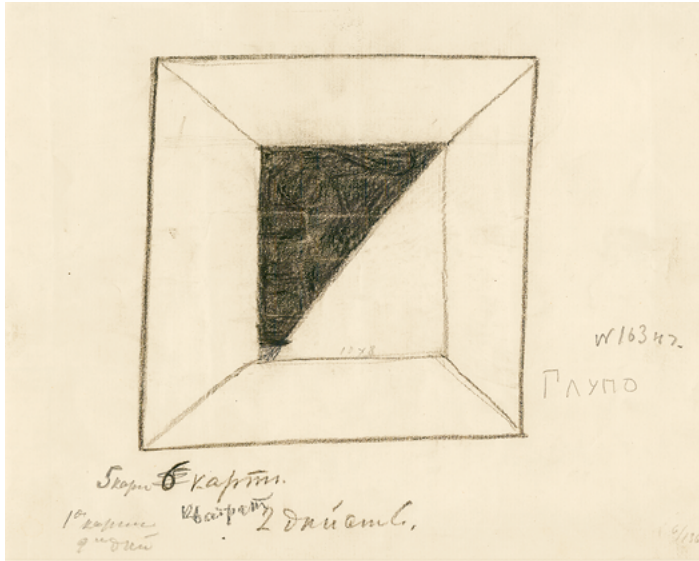
11 Pablo Picasso (1881–1973)
Tenor and Violin, 1913. Oil on canvas.
 55 × 33 cm. State Hermitage Museum

12 Kazimir Malevich (1879–1935)
Aviator, 1914. Oil on canvas. 125 × 65 cm.
 The State Russian Museum

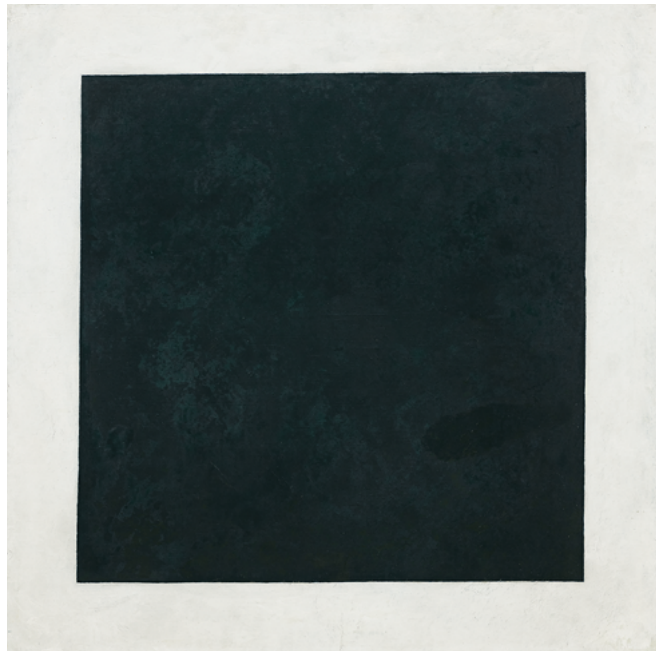


12

13



13 Kazimir Malevich (1879–1935)
*Set design sketch for the opera
 Victory over the Sun by Mikhail
 Matiushin and Aleksei Kruchenykh.
 Act 1, Scene 5, 1913. Italian pencil on
 paper. 21.3 × 27.2 cm. Saint Petersburg
 State Museum of Theatre and Music*



14 Kazimir Malevich (1879–1935)
*Black Square, circa 1923. Oil on
 canvas. 106 × 106 cm. The State
 Russian Museum*

14

From Image to Pure Colour

Artists:

Nikita Alexeev
 Erik Bulatov
 Mikhail Chernyshev
 Sofia Dymshits-Tolstaya
 Ivan Kliun
 Kazimir Malevich
 Oleg Prokofiev
 Aleksandr Rodchenko

Like *Black Square*, a number of the paintings exhibited by Malevich at the *Last Futurist Exhibition of Paintings 0.10* used only two colours—black and white. *Four Squares* (1915) numbered among these—a masterpiece of minimalism and economy, the image reduced to a pure sign. This small canvas—a veritable “object of contemplation”—would be the prototype for many developments in Russian and world art in the twentieth century.

In 1917, Malevich created the paintings in the *White on White* series, testifying to the boundless possibilities of work within one base colour. Aleksandr Rodchenko’s 1918 response, the *Black on Black* series of paintings, also referenced the mute black space at the centre of Malevich’s *Square*.

Both series were first exhibited in 1919 at the Tenth State Exhibition in Moscow. Despite their apparent similarity of concept, the two cycles are absolutely different: in Malevich’s work, we find impasto and incredible variety of texture, where white is a sign of calm, perfection, and infinity, while Rodchenko’s compass-drawn, shining and matte geometric planes are as though immersed in the black abyss of the ocean.

Towards the end of the twentieth century, the Soviet-American non-conformist Mikhail Chernyshev would return to the opposition of white and black. In this turn, Erik Bulatov would address the concept of *Four Squares* in his emblematic painting *Black night, white snow* (1999), subtly and ingeniously evoking it through the first lines of Aleksandr Blok’s poem *The Twelve*.

In 1920, Aleksandr Rodchenko returned to a bright palette and created a triptych that he declared the “logical end of painting.” *Pure Blue, Pure Red, and Pure Yellow* would become points of reference for generations of artists to come—in the first place, for the post-war masters of geometric abstraction. This work is a true manifesto, one of the most radical statements of the twentieth century. Before us are three canvases, each painted one of three colours—blue, red, and yellow. After these paintings, Rodchenko would turn to production art and black-and-white photography, rejecting painting as such. But the power of colour demonstrated by these three canvases would continue to resonate in Western and Russian art.

The large-scale cycle of multi-coloured *Impressions* by Nikita Alexeev sums up the colouristic searches of the past century, reaffirming the inescapable actuality and vast possibilities of work with pure colour that were first discovered by the artists of the Avant-garde.



15



16

15 Aleksandr Rodchenko (1891–1956)
Black on Black (Composition no. 81),
1918. Oil on canvas. 84 × 66.5 cm.
The State Russian Museum

16 Aleksandr Rodchenko (1891–1956)
Pure Red. Pure Yellow. Pure Blue, 1921.
Oil on canvas. Triptych: each work
62.5 × 52.5 cm. Private collection

Colour–Painting

Artists:

Roman Cherezov
 Ivan Chuikov
 Maria Ender
 Francisco Infante–Arana
 Ivan Kliun
 Mikhail Matiushin
 Olga Rozanova
 Konstantin Rozhdestvensky

Aristotle considered the colour of an object to be of lesser significance than its form.* Unlike its structure, the colour of an object is easily altered, and, additionally, depends on the most different of factors, including the degree of illumination and the technical characteristics of the optical instrument through which it is perceived, be it the human eye or the camera lens. It was only in the nineteenth century, with the dissolution of the visual contours of reality brought about by the steam engine and the acceleration of the railways that artists reconciled with the voluntarism of colour and “freed” it. Since that time, all modernists have constructed their own relations with this basic category of any image.

With the invention of photography, the imperfection of the eye as an optical instrument became clear. At the same time, the material, textured canvas and the presence of the frame began to be perceived by artists as hindrances to the fixation of “pure colour.” As Olga Rozanova said of her first experiences of colour collage on smooth paper: “The purpose of these paintings is liberation from the standard type of frame in the form of a rectangle or square.”** Colour gradually emancipated itself not just from the depicted object and the perceiving eye, but also from the canvas. The painting, which had been understood as a window onto the world since the Renaissance, became an obstacle to the limitless and immaterial flight of colour–and–light. A later cultural turn would see the limiting form of “colour–painting” become the spatial installation, in which the borders of colour and light were radically blurred, and painting became not so much an optical as a bodily experience.

* *Batchelor D.* Chromophobia. London: Reaktion Books, 2000. P. 29.

** *Guryanova N.* Olga Rozanova [i ranny] russky] avangard [Olga Rozanova and the Early Russian Avant–Garde]. Moscow, Gileia Publ., 2002. P. 169.



17



17 Olga Rozanova (1886–1918)
Non-Objective Composition (Flight of an Aeroplane), 1916. Oil on canvas.
 118 × 101 cm. Samara Regional Art Museum

18 Francisco Infante-Arana (b. 1943)
Spiral II, 1965. Tempera on paper.
 95 × 46 cm. AZ Museum

19 Ivan Chuiikov (1935–2020)
Window XIV, 1980. Enamel paint on wood.
 149 × 120.5 cm. The Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts



19

City

Artists:

Ilya Chasnik
Leonid Chupiatov
Alexandra Exter
Zaha Hadid
Ivan Kudriashov
Mikhail Le Dentu
El Lissitzky
Vladimir Seleznyov
Nikolai Suetin
Alexander Yulikov

Cities in Russia and Europe changed dramatically from the end of the nineteenth century to the start of the twentieth. Tall buildings and factories, electrical lighting, railways, tramways, and automobiles appeared. Cities began to shine and rumble, and, most importantly, to accelerate. The city of the modern epoch became akin to a living being, with natural phenomena, architectural forms, and human bodies incorporated into and subjected to the will of a strong but diseased organism. This is precisely the change in time, space, and emotion fixed by Alexandra Exter in the representation of Moscow she called “synthetic”—pedestrians, factories, and buildings find themselves almost on a single plane, with no distinction between foreground and background.

The modernist city that struck the artists of the beginning of the century and inspired them to create new art had a dark side. It was founded on inequality, social division, and the exploitation of man and nature—regardless of whether it was the “reinforced concrete slab of the communist fundament” or the “capitalist, imperialist town, with its centre of stock exchanges (the City),” as El Lissitzky wrote.* Today, it is no longer rhapsodising over a spreading urban space that unites artists across the world, but an impending ecological and social catastrophe. Any modern megapolis, however much it may resemble a city of dreams, proves, on closer inspection, a city of traumas.

* *El Lissitzky. The Catastrophe of Architecture // Lissitzky-Küppers S. El Lissitzky: Life, Letters, Texts. Greenwich, CT: New York Graphic Society, 1968. P. 365–67.*



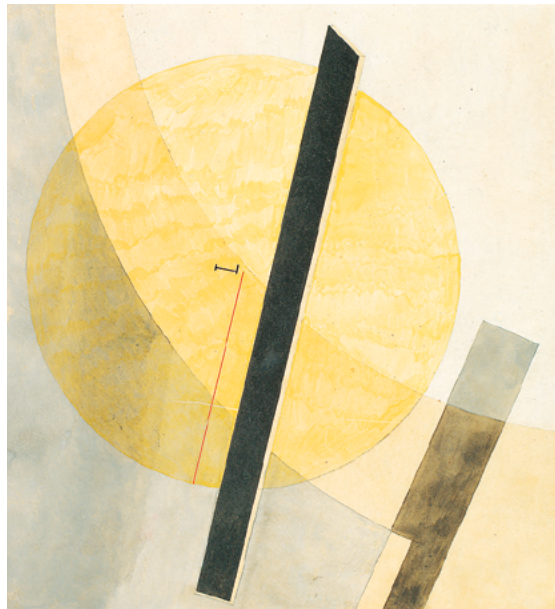
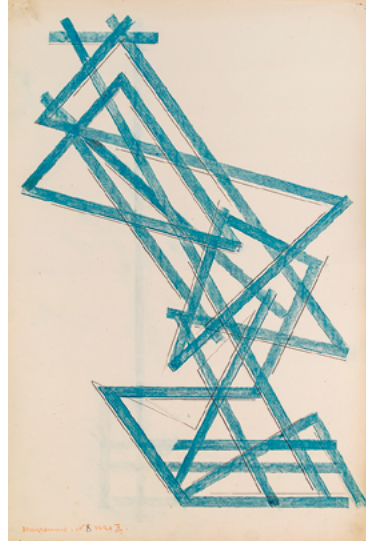
20

20 Alexandra Exter (1882–1949)
Moscow, Synthetic City, 1914. Oil on
 canvas. 110 × 100 cm. Collection of
 Iveta and Tamaz Manasheroev

21 Aleksandr Rodchenko (1891–1956)
Construction no. 8, 1921. Coloured
 pencil on paper. 48.5 × 32.5 cm.
 Collection of Iveta and Tamaz
 Manasheroev

22 El Lissitzky (1890–1941)
Proun, 1920–1921. Watercolour,
 graphite pencil, and ink on paper.
 24.3 × 22.1 cm. Russian State Archive
 of Literature and Art

21



22

Construction

Artists:

Francisco Infante-Arana
Viacheslav Koleichuk
László Moholy-Nagy
Liubov Popova
Nikolai Punin
Aleksandr Rodchenko
Anya Zhelud

The invention of prefabricated metal structures and reinforced concrete in the second half of the nineteenth century laid the foundations for many artistic utopias. A metal framework is easily put together and taken apart, and erecting a building from such material is significantly faster and cheaper than building from brick or stone. Reinforced concrete also allows for the creation of practically any architectural form. These innovations in building and construction led to significant aesthetic changes: by the end of the nineteenth century, European architecture had run the course from the reproduction of all possible historical styles to the invention of new types and forms of social and private spaces—transport centres and exhibition pavilions, houses of culture and shopping arcades.

This engineering and production revolution clearly demonstrated to many, including painters and writers, that artistic form and content are inextricably linked—in modernism, changes in content are inevitably accompanied by changes in form. For this reason, much of the art of the twentieth century strives to reveal its method, intentionally underlining its structure. As the avant-garde theoretician and practician Sergei Tretyakov put it in 1922: “The scaffolding and laying of bricks is observed with greater interest than the house itself, the sketch—with greater interest than the painting...”^{*} Later, in the middle of the century, the philosopher Marshall McLuhan would sum up that “the medium is the message.” Artists of the past and present have proposed a multitude of projects for universal utopias—and while the versions of artists such as Vladimir Tatlin and László Moholy-Nagy may have differed significantly, all of them understood that the new world would necessarily require new forms.

^{*} *Tretyakov S. Velikodushnyj rogonosets [The Magnanimous Cuckold] // Zrelishcha Weekly, 1922, no. 8. P. 12.*



23



24

23 Liubov Popova (1889–1924)
Spatial Force Construction,
 1921. Oil on plywood (parquetry).
 63.5 × 59.5 cm. The State Tretyakov
 Gallery. Donated by George Costakis
 in 1977

24 Nikolai Punin (1888–1953)
Monument to the Third International.
A project by V. E. Tatlin. Petrograd:
 Published by the Department of Fine
 Arts of the People's Commissariat
 for Education, 1920. 28 × 22 cm. State
 Museum of Vladimir Mayakovsky

Symbol and Gesture

Artists:

Jean-Michel Basquiat
 Jasper Johns
 Jörg Immendorff
 Wassily Kandinsky
 Anselm Kiefer
 Hermann Nitsch
 Boris Turetsky
 Cy Twombly
 Andy Warhol

Throwing all previous traditions “off the steamboat of modernity,” the twentieth century is often imagined as an epoch of spontaneous artistic gestures: at times, it is difficult to draw the line between the truly innovative and reflective of a changing reality and what might be termed “the emperor’s new clothes.” The Romantic ideas of the nineteenth century—a period during which reality was subordinated to the divine inspiration of the artist-creator, the intermediary between the heavenly and the earthly, capable of transforming reality and rearranging it according to their rich inner world—persisted into the twentieth century. In fact, we continue to live among these paradigms today.

The art of Wassily Kandinsky, a pioneer of abstraction in painting, is a striking example of a combination of deep understanding, reflection, original artistic philosophy, and spontaneity. His canvases fixed moments of artistic breakthrough, the preparations for which often went on for months, sometimes even years. *Improvisation 34* (1913), subtitled “East II,” was preceded by countless watercolours and sketches: the canvas is run through with memories of languid Eastern women and the mermaids one finds carved into Russian window frames. This said, it would be difficult to find an abstract painting so immediate and full of energy as this one, painted in the shortest possible time in October of 1913.

Kandinsky considered every colour to have its own sound, and his paintings are closely related to music. Hermann Nitsch, a leading figure in Viennese actionism, was also an outstanding musician, and one finds traces of his admiration for Kandinsky and Scriabin in his depictions of coloured sound and sounding colour. A musical composition he dedicated to Moscow was performed at the Tretyakov Gallery in 2019, and in 2021, shortly before his death, Nitsch presented the museum with his monumental and expressive *MZM_025_09* (2009). The product of his *Cathedral of Colour* action, Nitsch’s canvas resonates with many of the works in this section of *Square and Space*.

Looking at *Abstract Composition* (1958), an unassuming work by a then still very young Boris Turetsky, one is reminded of the tandem of Jean-Michel Basquiat and Andy Warhol. Their monumental canvas *Untitled* (1984) is a perfect model of the spontaneity brought about by the necessity of making one’s action commensurate with that of a co-author,

and an example of the artistic collaboration characteristic of contemporary musical groups. The work illustrates Virgil Abloh's statement that "Life is collaboration," in which the main thing is to "give and take from each other"—this is how "you create things that are totally new."^{**} "The union of these two exceptional talents produces an explosion of energy and colour that it would be difficult to expect from them individually" echoes the art critic Dieter Buchhart.^{**}

A balance of improvisation and exceptionally thorough preparation also distinguishes the works of the American artists Jasper Johns and Cy Twombly: their canvases are replete with references to Kandinsky's abstractions and prehistoric painting; in this way, having drawn a full circle, the history of art returns to its sources.

The final chord in this section is Anselm Kiefer's large-scale work *Naval battles recur every 317 years...* (2016). Kiefer's eschatological vision, which calls to mind Albrecht Altdorfer's *The Battle of Alexander at Issus* (1529) with its seemingly boundless, all-encompassing perspective, is akin to a prophecy, a recognition of the impossibility of resisting the inexorable march of time and will of fate.

* Basquiat × Warhol: *Painting Four Hands*. Paris: Gallimard, 2023. P. 17.

** *Ibid.* P. 27.

25



25 Jean-Michel Basquiat (1960–1988),
Andy Warhol (1928–1987)
Untitled, 1984. Oil and acrylic on
canvas. 194.3×266.7 cm. Ludwig
Museum at the State Russian Museum

26 Boris Turetsky (1928–1997)
Abstract Composition, 1958. Oil on
canvas. 83×55.5 cm. Collection of
Anton Kozlov

26

27



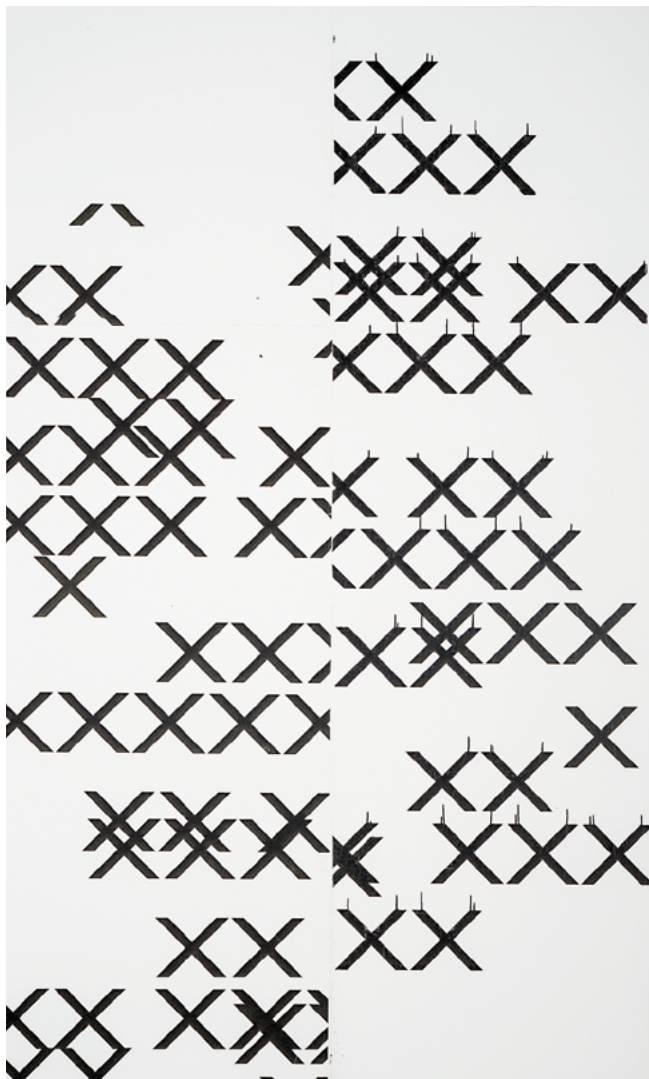
28

27 Cy Twombly (1928–2011)
Untitled, 1968. Oil on canvas.
173 × 216.3 cm. Ludwig Museum at the
State Russian Museum

28 Anselm Kiefer (b. 1945)
Naval battles recur every 317 years...,
2016. Oil, acrylic, emulsion, shellac,
and lead on canvas. 190 × 330 × 15 cm.
Private collection

Interlude

Artists:
Erik Bulatov
Wade Guyton
Oleg Vassiliev



29 Wade Guyton (b. 1972)
Untitled, 2006. Epson UltraChrome
inkjet on linen. 226.7 × 137.8 cm.
Collection of V—A—C Foundation



30

30 Oleg Vassiliev (1931–2013)
Abandoned Road, 2001. Oil on canvas.
180×152 cm. ART4 Museum

31 Erik Bulatov (b. 1933)
Door, 2009–2011. Oil on canvas.
210×150 cm. Courtesy of the artist



31

Man

Artists:

Francis Bacon
Semyon Faibisovich
Antony Gormley
Alexander Khlebnikov
Kazimir Malevich
Michelangelo Pistoletto
Varvara Stepanova
Rudolf Stingel
Vladimir Yakovlev
Vladimir Yankilevsky

“One can certainly wager that man would be erased, like a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea.” In these lines, Michel Foucault suggests a connection between the artistic process of creating a drawing and the definition of human nature. Art is a human invention, which is why each change that takes place in human minds and bodies over the course of history inevitably realises itself in it too. The appearance and spread of photography in the second half of the nineteenth century brought out the difference between art and a technical reproduction of reality. This “artificiality” of art, revealed through the invention of photography, brought the mimetic tradition into question. The age-old genre of portraiture changed particularly radically, along with artists’ perception of faces, figures, and characters. Yet, if the task of representing man can no longer be reduced to a naturalistic representation of the body, what, as Kazimir Malevich put it, is the “additional element” that ensures the “authentic” humanity of a work? And what is man, “in reality”?

The twentieth century proposed a multitude of varyingly comprehensive and contradictory answers to this question. All the same, a single answer was not settled upon, and, according to Foucault, could not have been, in as far as any answer would always depend on a concrete time and place. It is in diversity of interpretation that the essence of modernist views on man is to be found.



32

32 Alexander Khlebnikov (1897–1979)
Perfume Advertisement, 1931. Gelatin
silver print on photographic paper.
33.8 × 27 cm. The Borodulin Collection

33 Varvara Stepanova (1894–1958)
Head, 1920. Oil on cardboard.
45 × 28.4 cm. Collection of Iveta and
Tamaz Manasherov



33

Games with the Square

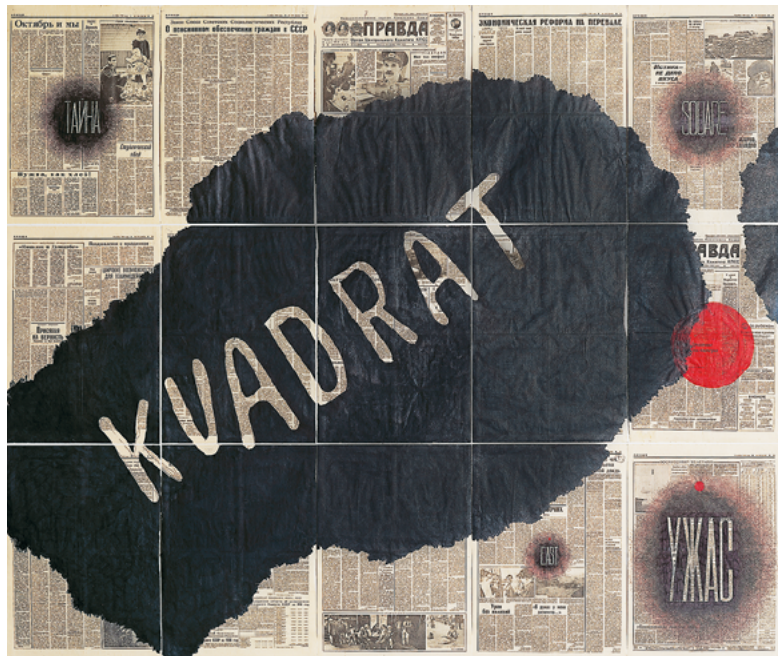
Artists:

Irina Nakhova
Dmitry Prigov
Igor Shelkovsky
Boris Turetsky

For twentieth-century artists, Kazimir Malevich's *Black Square* was akin to a child's building block. Based on the *Square*'s formal and conceptual discoveries, more than a dozen artistic "castles" were constructed. The remarkable openness of the *Square* to varying interpretations by artists of the past and the present was expressed best of all by the British art historian Timothy J. Clark at the turn of the twenty-first century: "The *Black Square* is at once the strongest instance of the new belief-system and its *reductio ad absurdum*. Among its many other undecidables—is it a figure? is it a ground? is it matter? is it spirit? is it fullness? is it emptiness? is it end? is it beginning? is it nothing? is it everything? is it manic assertion? or absolute letting-go?—is the question of whether it laughs itself to scorn."^{*}

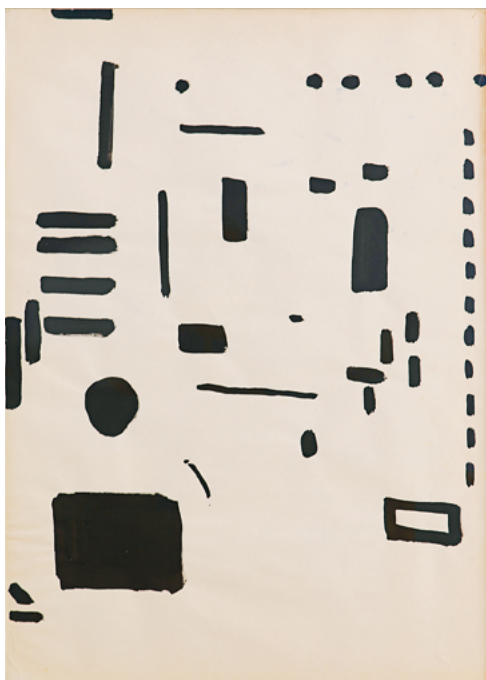
It was more or less in this spirit that post-war Soviet artists understood the "message" of *Black Square*. Finding themselves at a half-century's remove from the painting, they perceived it as a negation, an affirmation of the impossibility of any kind of representativeness. Proclaiming the death of the old art and the necessity of creating a new culture, the *Black Square* allowed artists to draw on its accumulated interpretations as material for utopic and pragmatic world building. It provided post-war Soviet artists for whom the pathos of a revolutionary transformation of reality had become a tired rhetorical trope with an instrument indicating how a connection with a previous, stagnant system of art might be demonstratively broken apart, and an incontestable reference point demonstrating the artist to be capable of creating his own independent aesthetic system. Postmodernism endowed Malevich's already manifesto-like work with great pathos, and retroactively recognised it as the forerunner of many of its own formal and conceptual discoveries. And through postmodern play, grotesque, and irony, the *Black Square* finally learned to laugh.

* Clark T. J. Farewell to an Idea: Episodes from a History of Modernism. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999. P. 254.



34

34 Dmitry Prigov (1940–2007)
Malevich's Square, 1989. Ink and ballpoint pen on newspaper.
 2 parts: 182.5 × 215.5 cm each.
 Ludwig Museum at the State Russian Museum



35

35 Boris Turetsky (1928–1997)
Rhythmic Motif, 1957. Ink on paper.
 82 × 59 cm. Collection of Anton Kozlov

Minimalism and Op Art

Artists:

Tatiana Andreeva
Vladimir Galkin
Francisco Infante-Arana
Viacheslav Koleichuk
Lev Nussberg
Prometei Student
Construction Bureau
Victor Vasarely
Rimma Zanevskaya-Sapgir

In the middle of the twentieth century, human reality began to lose its physical dimension. Technological advancements—television, computers, lasers—and their entry into people's everyday lives made the environment more and more immaterial. In the 1960s and 1970s, these processes were reflected in the creative explorations of many artists who sought to examine the new technological dimension in their works.

During the second half of the twentieth century, two artistic movements contributed significantly to this “dema-terialisation of art”—minimalism, an artistic means of demonstrating contemporaneity's seemingly radical diversity of visual forms to be illusory and founded on a small number of simple mathematical formulas, and op art, an attempt to use these formulas for the creation of new aesthetic illusions.

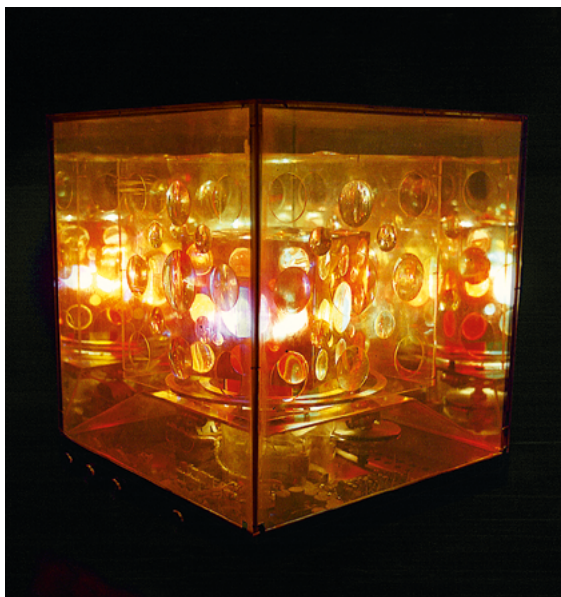
However, simplicity and emptiness were not exclusively carriers of negation. In many ways, they were also what enabled the active inclusion of the viewer into the space of art. If any work is only an optical illusion, and, like a programme, reducible to a mathematical code, what proves valuable is how a person interacts with this programme. Thus, the calls for a fusion of art and life made by avant-garde artists at the start of the twentieth century would only find embodiment half a century later, in art and design based on modern technologies.



36

36 Rimma Zanevskaya-Sapgir
(1930–2021)
Composition, 1970. Oil on canvas.
90 × 90 cm. Collection of Anton Kozlov

37 Prometei Student Construction
Bureau (Valentin Bukatin,
Bulat Galeev, Radik Galiavin,
Rustam Saifullin)
Yalkyn-1, 1974/2024. Light and sound
device. 41 × 41 × 48 cm. Musical score:
Vanya Limb (b. 1991). *DKB*, 2021.
12 minutes 37 seconds. Bulat Galeev
Prometei Foundation for Audiovisual
and Science Art. Reconstructed
with the support of GES-2 House of
Culture



37

Space of Life and Art

Artists:

Tatiana Badanina
Aleksandr Deineka
Ralph Goings
Liu Guoqiang
Candida Höfer
Ilya and Emilia Kabakov
Vladimir Marin
Meganom studio
Aleksandr Rodchenko
Mikhail Roginsky
Lihi Turjeman

Representing found objects—“ready made”—as works of art was first proposed by Marcel Duchamp, but this artistic approach can be applied even more widely. Absolutely anything, from unbuild spaces to architectural monuments, to say nothing of any manifestation of human activity, be it connected to work, politics, religion, or leisure, can be called a “found subject” or “ready-lived.” By the end of the nineteenth century, when social systems and lifestyles began to be determined by industry, art responded to the new reality without delay, reflecting and transforming it.

The approach to the representation of life and the public spaces where it took place ranged from realism to theatricalisation. At times, artists documented spaces of life, at others, they transformed these spaces into venues for their own productions. Public space acquired new, vibrant functions, prompting nostalgic reflections and representation of various extremes of the human lot—from the most deplorable to the most sublime, endowed with metaphysical meaning.

At times, artists substitute reality with richer symbols, addressing historical or religious themes. The space of life is also related to the body, or its absence: the space of art enters into dialogue with every person, leaving the relationships between that person and those that share the space with them out of frame. From the start of the twentieth century to our days, artists have been preoccupied with the idea of presence and non-presence. Most strikingly, this was reflected in the so-called “aesthetic of interaction”: here, it is the process of interaction with viewers itself that becomes a work of art.

38



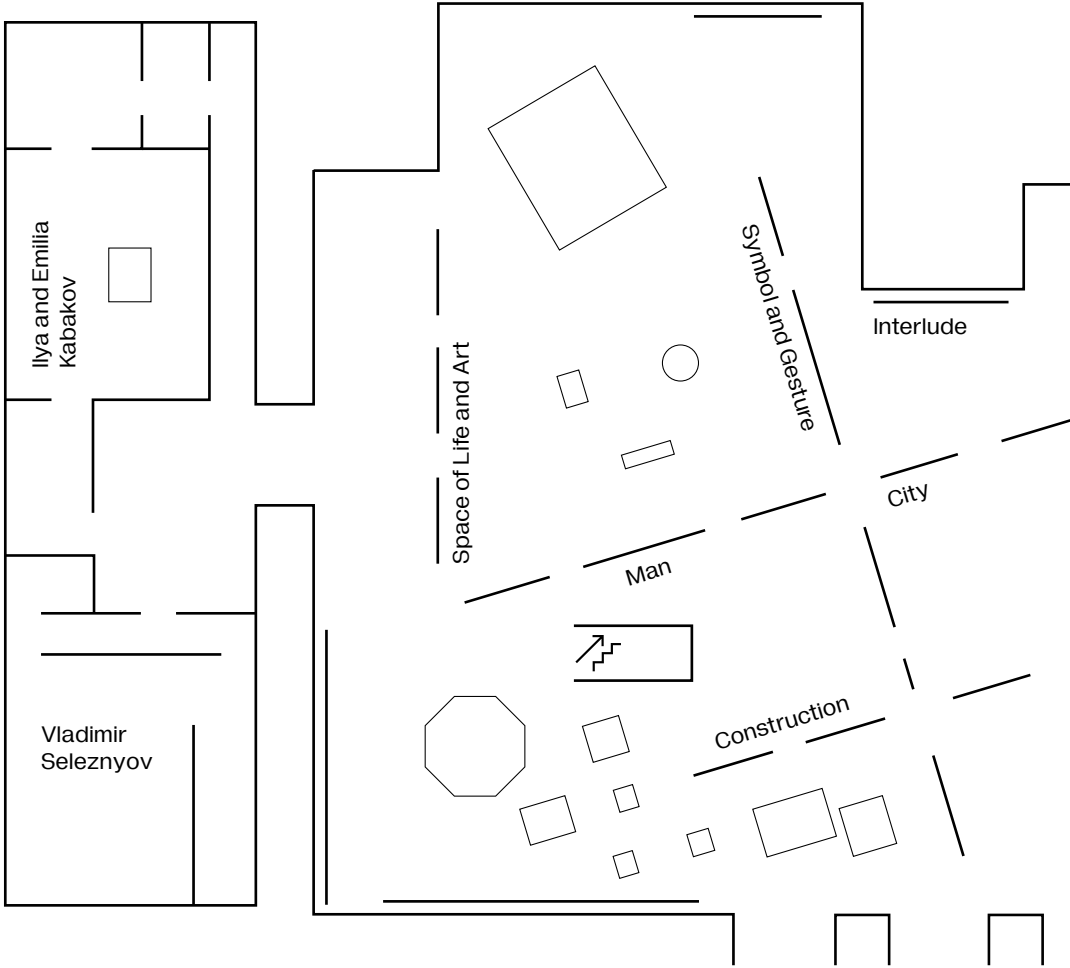
38 Aleksandr Deineka (1899–1969)
Textile Workers, 1927. Oil on canvas.
171×195 cm. The State Russian
Museum

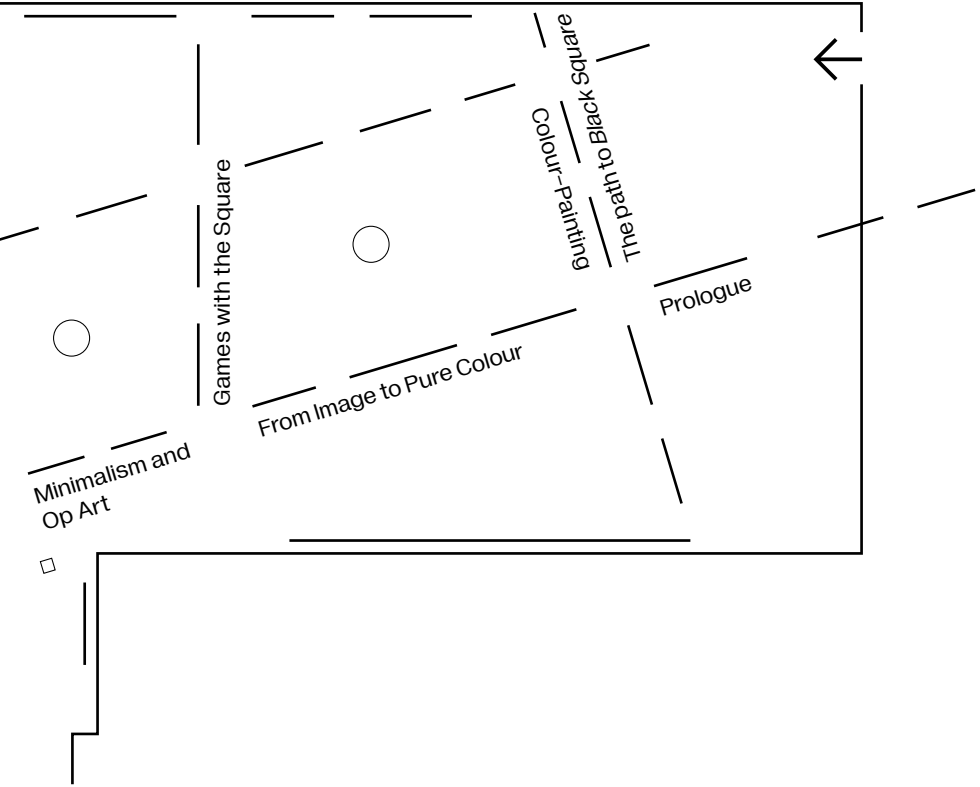
39 Candida Höfer (b. 1944)
Hermitage. St. Petersburg VIII 2014,
2015. C-Print on paper. 180×226.4 cm.
State Hermitage Museum



39

Exhibition plan





Curators

Francesco Bonami
Zelfira Tregulova

Authors

Ivan Aivazovsky
Nikita Alexeev
Tatiana Andreeva
Francis Bacon
Tatiana Badanina
Jean-Michel Basquiat
Erik Bulatov
Ilya Chashnik
Roman Cherezov
Mikhail Chernyshev
Ivan Chuikov
Leonid Chupiatov
Thierry de Cordier
Aleksandr Deineka
Sofia Dymshits-Tolstaya
Maria Ender
Alexandra Exter
Semyon Faibisovich
Robert Fludd
Vladimir Galkin
Ralph Goings
Antony Gormley
Wade Guyton
Zaha Hadid
Candida Höfer
Jörg Immendorff
Francisco Infante-Arana
Jasper Johns
Ilya and Emilia Kabakov
Wassily Kandinsky
Alexander Khlebnikov
Anselm Kiefer
Ivan Kliun
Viacheslav Koleichuk
Ivan Kudriashov
Arkhip Kuindzhi
Mikhail Le Dentu
El Lissitzky
Liu Guoqiang
Kazimir Malevich
Vladimir Marin
Mikhail Matiushin
Meganom studio (Yuri Grigoryan,
Pavel Ivanchikov, Ilya Kuleshov,
Yuri Kuznetsov, Alexandra Pavlova)
László Moholy-Nagy
Irina Nakhova
Hermann Nitsch
Lev Nussberg
Pablo Picasso
Michelangelo Pistoletto
Liubov Popova
Illarion Pryanishnikov
Dmitry Prigov
Oleg Prokofiev
Prometei Construction Bureau
(Valentin Bukatin, Bulat Galeev,
Radik Galyavin, Rustam Saifullin)
Nikolai Punin
Gerhard Richter

Aleksandr Rodchenko
Mikhail Roginsky
Olga Rozanova
Konstantin Rozhdestvensky
Vladimir Seleznyov
Vasily Shchetinin
Igor Shelkovsky
Varvara Stepanova
Laurence Sterne
Rudolf Stingel
Nikolai Suetin
Boris Turetsky
Lihi Turjeman
Cy Twombly
Victor Vasarely
Oleg Vassiliev
Andy Warhol
Vladimir Yakovlev
Vladimir Yankilevsky
Alexander Yulikov
Rimma Zanevskaya-Sapgir
Anya Zhelud

Lead architect

Eugene Asse

Architects

Olga Aistova
Kirill Shiryayev

Producers

Alisa Kekelidze
Veronica Luchnikova
Ksenia Makshantseva

Assistant Curator

Dmitry Belkin

Technical production

Andrei Belov
Artem Kanifatov
Ksenia Kosaya
Artem Marenkov
Nikita Tolkachev

Art logistics and registration

Angelina Korovina
Daria Krivtsova

Accessibility and inclusion curators

Vlad Kolesnikov
Vera Zamyslova

Graphic design

Misha Filatov

Editors

Daniil Dugaev
Olga Grinkrug
Alexandra Kirillova

English texts

Charlotte Neve

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Borodulin Collection
Bulat Galeev Prometei Foundation for Audiovisual and Science Art
Collection of Anton Kozlov
Collection of Iveta and Tamaz Manasherov
Collection of Sasha Obukhova
Collection of V-A-C Foundation
Ludwig Museum at the State Russian Museum
Moscow Museum of Modern Art
MYRA Collection
Nizhny Novgorod State Art Museum
Museum of Fine Arts Pushkin State
Museum of Fine Arts Rudomino
Library for Foreign Literature
Russian State Archive of Literature and Art
Russian State Library
Saint Petersburg State Museum of Theatre and Music
Samara Regional Art Museum
Saratov Radishchev State Art Museum
Sedykh Family Collection
Shalva Breus Collection State Hermitage
State Museum of Fine Arts, Tatarstan
State Museum of Vladimir Mayakovsky
State Museum of the History of Saint Petersburg
State Russian Museum
State Tretyakov Gallery
Viacheslav Koleichuk Family Collection
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