Revolution
Russian Art 1917 – 1932

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Revolution: Russian Art 1917–1932

One hundred years after the Revolution, this exhibition explores the rich diversity of art made in Russia during one of the most turbulent periods in modern history.

In October 1917 Vladimir Lenin and the socialist Bolshevik Party swept to power and ended centuries of autocratic rule under the Tsars. Shortly afterwards, 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.
At first, avant-garde artists embraced the Revolution and the promise of a new art for a new world. But by the late 1920s they were condemned by the Soviet authorities, who promoted what became known as Socialist Realism, a style that was easy for the masses to understand.

For a few years these different approaches co-existed, a plurality celebrated in the landmark exhibition ‘Fifteen Years of Artists of the Russian Soviet Republic’ in 1932, the inspiration for the present exhibition.

Like that show, ‘Revolution’ places avant-garde artists together with Socialist Realists in the context of the revolutionary times in which they worked.

Alongside such well-known painters as Kazimir Malevich, Vasily Kandinsky and Marc Chagall, figures less familiar in the West are introduced, such as Pavel Filonov, Kuzma Petrov-Vodkin and Alexander Deineka.
This exhibition celebrates the vitality and variety of art in the fifteen years after the Revolution. In line with Communist ideals, artists were encouraged to make art for everyday life that would reach a wide audience.

In addition to painting and sculpture, they created innovative work in photography, film and the graphic arts, as well as ceramics and textiles.

But, in 1932 Stalin decreed that Socialist Realism was the only acceptable style for the Soviet Union, ending an era of dazzling creativity that flourished in desperate times.
Salute the Leader

In October 1917 Lenin and his Bolshevik Party seized power from the provisional government that had deposed Nicholas II in March of that year, a coup that had brought the Russian Empire to an end.

Overnight the Bolsheviks became the ruling party, but with 350,000 followers they were a significant minority in a country of 140 million people. Mass propaganda was, therefore, a vital tool in spreading Bolshevik ideology to an overwhelmingly rural and largely illiterate population.

In April 1918 Lenin announced his Plan for Monumental Propaganda. Painting and sculpture, and even such everyday items as fabrics and ceramics, promoted Bolshevik ideology and glorified the leader.
Palaces were festooned with posters and slogans, and grandiose plaster-cast monuments were temporarily erected to honour the Party and its luminaries. Regular festivals and street parades were organised, at which red revolutionary banners, commissioned by factories, were proudly carried aloft by workers.

Russia was a profoundly Christian country but soon the Russian Orthodox Church was banned. ‘Icons’ of Lenin replaced those of Christ.

When Lenin died in 1924, he was revered like a religious saint and his body was permanently enshrined in a mausoleum in Moscow’s Red Square. Petrograd (formerly St Petersburg) was renamed Leningrad.

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.
List of works (clockwise in order of hang)

Moisey Nappelbaum
Vladimir Ilyich Lenin
1922
Gelatin silver print
Alex Lachmann Collection, London

 Isaak Brodsky
Vladimir Lenin and a Demonstration
1919
Oil on canvas
The State Historical Museum, Moscow
Kliment Redko

Insurrection

1925

Oil on canvas

State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow

A diamond of fire burns the city, turning it into a prison that reflects the artist’s increasingly negative view of the Bolshevik regime.

Redko, who was trained as an icon painter, adopts the composition of a traditional Christ in Majesty icon, but replaces Christ with the figure of Lenin, surrounded by his disciples.

Because these figures include Trotsky and others who would soon be denounced by Stalin, the painting was hidden until the reform of the Soviet Union in the 1980s.
Adolf Strakhov

Lenin 1870–1924

1924

Poster reproduction

© Communist propaganda poster/Universal History Archive/uig/Bridgeman Images

Georgy Rublev

Portrait of Joseph Stalin

c. 1930

Oil on canvas

State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow

This informal, domestic portrait offers a marked contrast to the many official portraits of Stalin. Rublev, who was still in his twenties and experimenting with a deliberately primitive style of painting, did not intend to create a subversive picture of the dictator.
Nevertheless, it was unthinkable to show it to Stalin or exhibit it in public, so the work remained hidden in Rublev’s studio until the artist’s death.

**Isaak Brodsky**

*Portrait of Joseph Stalin*

1927

Oil on canvas

The Russian Academy of Fine Arts Museum, St Petersburg

**Isaak Brodsky**

*Lenin in Smolny*

1930

Oil on canvas

State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow

(continued over)
Brodsky, a prominent realist artist of the era, painted Lenin many times. This portrait of the leader in the Bolshevik headquarters in Petrograd, produced after his death but based on earlier drawings, became the archetypal image of Lenin in the Soviet Union.

Although an official portrait, it is an intimate portrayal of Lenin, who sits quietly writing a letter, while the empty armchair seems to invite the viewer to join him.

Boris Kustodiev

Demonstration on Uritsky Square on the Day of the Opening of the Second Comintern Congress in July 1920

1921

Oil on canvas

State Russian Museum, St Petersburg
Central display

Nikolai Terpsikhorov
First Motto
1924
Oil on canvas
State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow

Vera Mukhina
Flame of the Revolution
1922–1923
Bronze-toned cast of 1954
State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow

This sculpture was Mukhina’s entry for the competition to design a monument honouring the Revolutionary Yakov Sverdlov. The competition was part of Lenin’s Plan for Monumental Propaganda.
Reconstruction of a Revolutionary Banner with the Slogan “All Power to the Soviets”
Paint on double-bonded fabric
Reconstruction by India Harvey, 2016

Arkady Shaiket
Red Square
1926
Gelatin silver print
Alex Lachmann Collection, London

Alexei Shchusev
Lenin Mausoleum
1929
Gouache, ink and pencil on paper
Alex Lachmann Collection, London
Alexei Shchusev
Model of Lenin’s Mausoleum
1924
Wood
Alex Lachmann Collection, London

Defying Russian Orthodox tradition, Lenin’s body was not buried but instead displayed for public worship in a specially designed mausoleum in Red Square, Moscow.

Shchusev’s wooden mausoleum was partly inspired by Ancient Egyptian pyramids. The permanent structure in marble and granite, which still stands today, combines the grandeur of the Socialist Realist style with elements of avant-garde architecture.
Kuzma Petrov-Vodkin

Beside Lenin’s Coffin
1924
Oil on canvas
State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow

This painting of “holy” Lenin in his coffin glows with a preternatural, divine light.

Based on sketches made at Lenin’s funeral, the work was excluded from public display for many years, as it was unacceptable to show the leader dead.

Display case 1

Unknown

Stalin as the Glorious Leader
1928
Lacquer, tempera and gold paint on papier mâché
The Petr Aven Collection
Mikhail Adamovich
Dulevo Porcelain Factory, Moscow
Plate Depicting the Second Interim Wooden Mausoleum of Vladimir Lenin, which Preceded the Present Granite Mausoleum
1924
Enamel paint on porcelain, gilding
The Petr Aven Collection
Mikhail Adamovich
State Porcelain Factory, Petrograd
Cup Depicting Leon Trotsky with the Inscription “Red Army Workers’ Defence”
1923
Enamel paint on porcelain
The Petr Aven Collection
Maria Lebedeva
State Porcelain Factory, Leningrad
Decorative Vase with the inscription “The Liberated People” and Vladimir Lenin’s Portrait under Banners and Depictions of Scenes of Life in Different Nations
1929
Enamel paint on porcelain, gilding, etching on gold
The Petr Aven Collection

Nikolai Demkov
Kerchief with Portrait of Lenin in the Centre and Trotsky’s Corner Portrait Cut Out
1924
Cotton
The Burilin Ivanovo Museum of Local History, Ivanovo
(continued over)
Textiles, like other everyday objects, were used as Soviet propaganda. The portrait of Trotsky printed on this headscarf was cut out at some point after Stalin expelled him from the Communist Party in 1927.

Display case 2

184 Rudolf Vilde
State Porcelain Factory, Petrograd
Plate with the Inscription “Workers’ Victory 25 Oct.” on a Red Banner
1919
Enamel paint on porcelain, silvering, gilding, etching on gold
The Petr Aven Collection
Natalia Danko
State Porcelain Factory, Petrograd
Woman Embroidering a Banner
1919
Enamel paint on porcelain
The Petr Aven Collection

Films:

Dziga Vertov
Film Truth (Kino-pravda), no. 21
January 1925
Produced by KultKino
Excerpt: 1 minute 5 seconds

Titled to evoke the Communist Party newspaper ‘Pravda’ (‘Truth’), Vertov’s newsreel series ‘Film Truth’ reported on current events with a keen ideological bias.
This memorial edition marking the first anniversary of Lenin’s death included a novel graphic summary of his worsening health, followed by footage of mourners at his state funeral:

Felix Dzerzhinsky, first head of the Cheka (the military and security arm of the Party); the Red Army general Mikhail Frunze; Lenin’s widow and his sister; and Stalin.

Sergei Eisenstein and Grigori Alexandrov
October
1928
Produced by Sovkino
Excerpts: 1 minute 10 seconds

(continued over)
Commissioned to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the October Revolution, this film is built around spectacular re-creations of key events, including Lenin’s arrival at the Finland Station in Petrograd and the storming of the Winter Palace.

Counterpointing these were more conceptual sequences, such as the toppling of a statue of a Tsar, which is later shown in reverse motion to indicate the threat of counter-Revolutionaries.
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Thank you.

Molly Bretton, Access Manager

InTouch at the RA

Design & typography by WfS Create: mail@wfscreate.com
Revolution
Russian Art 1917 – 1932

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Descriptive commentary

Man and Machine: introduction to this gallery

Alexander Deineka, Construction of New Workshops, 1926
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Man and Machine

Stalin’s principal goal was to turn the Soviet Union into a world power by expanding its industrial production.

In 1928 he introduced the first of his Five-year Plans, which set targets for every factory. Physical labour and the healthy, efficient worker – both female and male – would bring advances in industry and communal wealth.

A new breed of superhero workers known as “shock-workers” symbolised this access to power through a synthesis of man and machine.

Painters, graphic designers, photographers, film-makers, ceramicists and textile designers were all encouraged to promote industry and the heroic worker.

Photography was perhaps the medium best suited to capturing the visual drama of industrial machinery.
As they could be reproduced for mass consumption in magazines and posters, photographs played a vital role in conveying political messages to the people.

Film also reached a wide audience. Sequences in Dziga Vertov’s film ‘The Man with a Movie Camera’ (1929) brilliantly suggest the aesthetic appeal of industrial processes and modernity.

Workers were seen as the liberated proletariat who no longer had to sell their life and labour for the profit of others. Together they collectively owned the means of production in what Karl Marx had called a dictatorship of the proletariat.

The reality, however, was strikingly at odds with this ideal. Many workers were effectively slaves, and strikers and slow workers were imprisoned or shot. Thousands died in accidents, of starvation or from freezing temperatures.
List of works (clockwise in order of hang)

Vladimir Mayakovsky
Blacksmith
March 1921
Recreation by Sofia Jonsson, 2016, of a design for a Russian Telegraph Agency (ROSTA) Stencil

Arkady Shaiket
Brigade of Shock-workers
1928
Gelatin silver print
Alex Lachmann Collection, London

Boris Ignatovich
Crankshafts
1930
Gelatin silver print
Alex Lachmann Collection, London
Alexander Rodchenko
Steering Wheels
1929
Gelatin silver print
Alex Lachmann Collection, London

Boris Ignatovich
Generator
1929
Gelatin silver print (stamped)
Alex Lachmann Collection, London

Large high-performance machines
demonstrated the modernisation of Soviet
Russia and its growing energy production.
The electricity generator became a source of
wonder and pride.
Here Ignatovich focused on the machine itself, as if it were a robotic creature newly created. This persuasive image, which was accessible to the masses through publication, has a message: working together, man and machine produce unprecedented power.

Arkady Shaiket
Komsomol at the Wheel
1929
Print from the 1950s
Alex Lachmann Collection, London

This image promotes the strong, heroic worker, a member of the Komsomol Communist youth organisation whose muscular strength is harnessed to the power of industrial machinery.

Posed high up behind a great wheel, he is an ideal as anonymous and perfect in his way as a Classical sculpture.
Georgi Zelma
Crane Operator
c. 1930
Gelatin silver print
Alex Lachmann Collection, London

Boris Ignatovich
Tightening the Bolt: Lever Controls for Tramways
1930
Gelatin silver print
Alex Lachmann Collection, London

Georgi Zelma
Red Army Soldiers by Power Cable
1931
Gelatin silver print
Alex Lachmann Collection, London
Boris Ignatovich
Stretching Cables
1930
Gelatin silver print
Alex Lachmann Collection, London

Arkady Shaiket
Construction of the Moscow Telegraphic Centre
1928
Gelatin silver print
Alex Lachmann Collection, London

Natan Altman
Russia. Labour
1921
Paper, enamel and charcoal on mahogany
State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow
Alexander Deineka
Let’s Mechanise Donbass
c. 1930
Gouache and collage on paper
Alex Lachmann Collection, London

The coal-mining centre of Donbass, situated in the basin along the Donets River in eastern Ukraine, was massively developed by the Soviets in the 1920s. Deineka’s design became a celebrated poster urging the mechanisation and electrification of industry, essential props of Stalin’s first Five-year Plan.

The artist’s method here is closer to Constructivist photomontage than to painting.

Vyacheslav Pakulin
Turbine Shop at the Factory ‘Elektrosila’
1931–1932
Oil on canvas
State Russian Museum, St Petersburg
Ekaterina Zernova
Tomato Paste Factory
1929
Oil on canvas
The Astrakhan State Art Gallery

Nikolai Denisovsky
Cast Iron Output
1930
Oil on canvas
State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow

Pavel Filonov
Tractor Workshop at the Putilov Factory
1931–1932
Oil on canvas mounted on cardboard
State Russian Museum, St Petersburg
Alexander Deineka

Textile Workers

1927

Oil on canvas

State Russian Museum, St Petersburg

In this textile factory heavy spools of thread are dragged away, while others are fixed in the looms or stored above them, depicted end on in a pattern of black circles.

Deineka assembled his compositions from collages of drawings, graphic images and photomontages. The spacious clarity and geometric structure of this painting show him combining an avant-garde visual vocabulary with figurative imagery.
Isaak Brodsky
Shock-worker from Dneprostroi
1932
Oil on canvas
The Russian Academy of Fine Arts Museum, St Petersburg

Here Brodsky celebrates the hydroelectric dam on the Dnepr River, which fuelled factories employing half a million people. The shock-worker was a new breed of superhero worker, highly efficient and assigned the most strenuous tasks.

Central display

Alexander Deineka
Construction of New Workshops
1926
Oil on canvas
State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow
Display case (back of central display)

Unknown
Kerchief Commemorating the Second Congress of the Trekhgornaya Textile Workers
1930s
Cotton fabric
JSC Trekhgornaya Manufactura, Moscow

Andrey Golubev
Red Spinner
1930
Cotton print fabric, chintz
The Burilin Ivanovo Museum of Local History, Ivanovo

Pre-revolutionary textile designs had mainly come from Parisian pattern books and were dominated by floral motifs. After the Revolution these patterns were rejected as bourgeois and thousands were destroyed. (continued over)
This fabric depicting a textile factory is typical of the new, acceptable motifs reflecting idealised modern Soviet life.

Daria Preobrazhenskaya
Five Years in Four
1930
Chintz, cotton fabric
The Burilin Ivanovo Museum of Local History, Ivanovo

The title of this fabric refers to Stalin’s aim to complete his first Five-year Plan for industry in only four years.

Liudmila Protopopova
Cup from the “Industrial” Tea Service
1931
Vitrified enamel paint on porcelain
The Petr Aven Collection
Mikhail Mokh, State Porcelain Factory, Leningrad

Tea Set ‘Metal’: Tray, Teapot, Sugar-bowl, Milk Jug, Two Cups with Saucers

1930

Enamel paint on glazed porcelain, gilding, etching on gold

The Petr Aven Collection

Russia’s principal porcelain works, the Imperial Porcelain Factory, was founded in 1744. After the Bolshevik Revolution it was nationalised by the state, producing ceramics for government and public consumption.

The large quantities of white porcelain left over from imperial times were decorated with proletarian political subjects and called “agitational porcelain”. Imperial monograms were simply painted over with the hammer and sickle.
Unknown
State Porcelain Factory, Leningrad
Dish Depicting a Moulding Workshop
1931
Enamel paint on porcelain
The Petr Aven Collection

Films:

Dziga Vertov
The Man with a Movie Camera
1929
Produced by VUFKU
1 minute 7 seconds
Vertov made this experimental film, without plot or intertitles, to demonstrate his belief that “life caught unawares” would interest audiences as much as the “opium” of fictional drama, a genre that he despised. We see a cinema audience fascinated by the exploits of a cameraman filming everyday life in Moscow and various Ukrainian cities.

**Dziga Vertov**

**Enthusiasm**

1930

Produced by VUFKU

Excerpt: 51 seconds

With ‘Enthusiasm’, Vertov was one of the first Soviet film-makers to use recorded sound. This ‘Symphony of the Donbass’ celebrated the industrial achievements of Stalin’s first Five-year Plan.
Vsevolod Pudovkin

The Deserter

1933

Produced by Mezhrabpom, USSR

Excerpt: 1 minute 9 seconds

A foreign shipyard completing an order for the Soviet Union is the setting for ‘The Deserter’, Pudovkin’s delayed first sound film, which put into practice the radical manifesto for “asynchrony” that he had developed with Eisenstein in 1929.

Here, rapidly edited industrial sound and imagery also recall the Constructivist aspirations of the 1920s.
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Molly Bretton, Access Manager
Revolution
Russian Art 1917 – 1932

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Brave New World: introduction to this gallery

Alexander Deineka, The Defence of Petrograd, 1928

Vasily Kandinsky, Troubled, 1917

Alexander Golovin, Portrait of Vsevolod Meyerhold, 1917

El Lissitzky, Design for an Apartment, 1932
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Brave New World

At first, the avant-garde passionately embraced the Revolution, which seemed to offer an opportunity to create an entirely new culture.

Radical innovations in Russian art had already occurred a few years before 1917, when artists such as Kazimir Malevich developed styles based on pure geometric form and colour.

But in the heady days after the Revolution, Vasily Kandinsky, El Lissitzky, Pavel Filonov, Lyubov Popova and many others seized their chance to shake off the past and produce brave new art.

The existing cultural infrastructure collapsed. Trains brightly painted with slogans and images, distributing propaganda materials, travelled throughout the country spreading Bolshevik ideas and art.
Avant-garde artists took on official cultural roles and gathered around the People’s Commissariat of Enlightenment (known as *NARKOMPROS*), led by Anatoly Lunacharsky, which recognised their status and secured them state commissions – an important source of work in the absence of a commercial art market.

The freedom and euphoria of the Revolution produced some of the most remarkable talents in art, theatre, music, literature and architecture.

But as early as 1921, their innovations were constrained by an increasingly repressive state. One of the greatest poets of the time, Alexander Blok, died that year, heartbroken by what the Revolution had so rapidly become.

For many, his death symbolised the death of the Revolution.
List of works (clockwise in order of hang)

Boris Kustodiev

The Bolshevik
1920

Oil on canvas
State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow

Kustodiev, who was disabled, described looking down on the Revolution from his window.

This big Bolshevik is a proletarian type, no more an individual than the crowd almost crushed beneath his feet. His size reflects the strength of the masses, that unstoppable stream of figures that spills around him and moves towards the church, perhaps to occupy or destroy it.
Alexander Deineka

The Defence of Petrograd

1928

Oil on canvas

The Central Armed Forces Museum of the Russian Federation, Moscow

This painting looks back to October 1919, the height of the Civil War, when the White Army reached Petrograd. The Bolshevik government in Moscow was prepared to let the city fall, but the Revolutionary Leon Trotsky personally organised its defence.

Factory workers were given weapons and the White Army was forced to retreat. Weary soldiers, on the upper level, are replaced by the inexhaustible supply of workers ready to die for the Soviet state.
Vladimir Mayakovsky
Enemies Surround Us...
June 1921

Russian Telegraph Agency (ROSTA) poster series reproductions
Collection of The Israel Museum, Jerusalem, Gift of Merrill C. and Dalia Berman, New York, to American Friends of the Israel Museum © The Israel Museum, Jerusalem by Meidad Suchowolski

Enemies surround us, We’ve a famine to fight
There cannot be a more desperate plight.
Now, let’s ask ourselves a question – What is the English worker’s situation?

1
In England the bourgeoisie’s warehouse is crammed with goods
But do workers have proper food, or clothes, or boots?
On the contrary, their earnings disappear

And the capitalist runs off looking for better markets,

While the destitute worker is left with empty pockets.

Prices soar as fast as a horserace;
Too fast for wages to keep up the pace.

Then the capitalist closes the factory down –
Having found not a buyer in the whole town.
But the English Cheka will make him pay
For all of his dastardly deeds some day.

Take a look at what’s happened:
England is rich, rolling in wealth –
But 2.5 million have no jobs.
8
Which means 6 million hungry mouths to feed
When you count the jobless and their families.

9
It’s easy to foresee what’s going to be –
The workers will have a look and see

10
And firmly take hold of warehouse and factory.

11
And since this crisis exists the world over –

12
Worldwide revolution is at their door –
As clearly as two times two is four.
Abram Shterenberg
The Poet and Painter Vladimir Mayakovsky at His Last Exhibition ‘Vladimir Mayakovsky: Twenty Years’ Work’, Moscow 1930

Gelatin silver print
Alex Lachmann Collection, London

Mayakovsky said that an artist’s palette was the street. He produced slogans and images for advertising hoardings, government shops and even sweet wrappers.

Here, he poses in front of a wall of hand-stencilled satirical posters that he made for the Russian Telegraph Agency (ROSTA) to promote literacy, hygiene and political events.
Kuzma Petrov-Vodkin
Portrait of the Poet Anna Akhmatova
1922
Oil on canvas
State Russian Museum, St Petersburg

Anna Akhmatova’s apartment in Leningrad was a place where the intelligentsia could meet to talk freely; it is now a museum.

Her first husband, Nikolai Gumilev, was executed for his anti-Bolshevik activities and their son Lev was sent to jail.

Her long-term partner, the art critic and curator Nikolai Punin, was arrested in 1949 for criticising the tastelessness of official portraits of Lenin. He died in the Gulag.
Kazimir Malevich
Portrait of the Art Critic and Curator Nikolai Punin
1933
Oil on canvas
State Russian Museum, St Petersburg

Alexander Rodchenko
The Poet and Painter Vladimir Mayakovsky
1924
Gelatin silver print
Alex Lachmann Collection, London

Mayakovsky was the greatest of the Russian Futurists – poets and painters determined to shock society. The Bolsheviks initially embraced him, but his scathing wit challenged the conservative tastes of the Party leaders. (continued over)
By the late 1920s Mayakovsky was disillusioned with the regime. His plays satirised Soviet philistinism and in 1930, devastated by the Revolution’s failure to match up to his dream, he shot himself.

150,000 people attended his funeral, while Stalin proclaimed him “the best and most talented poet of our Soviet epoch”.

Moisey Nappelbaum
The Writer Maxim Gorky
1927
Gelatin silver print
Alex Lachmann Collection, London

Maxim Gorky’s work, notably his play ‘The Lower Depths’ (1902), revealed the poverty and hardships of the Russian people.
He was a prominent figure in the Revolution but had a difficult relationship with Lenin’s Bolsheviks: they publicly acclaimed him but he privately loathed their brutality.

Similarly, Stalin hailed Gorky as “the great proletarian writer”, founding father of Soviet literature and inventor of Socialist Realism, but Gorky found it hard to condone the regime’s increasingly extreme policies.

Moisey Nappelbaum
The Poet Anna Akhmatova
1924
Gelatin silver print
Alex Lachmann Collection, London

Anna Akhmatova was one of the most acclaimed poets in Soviet Russia. Her poems – sensuous, religious and erotic – were learned by heart by millions. The Bolshevik Commissar for Culture denounced her as “half-harlot, half-nun”.

(continued over)
With her husband executed and her son in the Gulag, she devoted her masterpiece ‘Requiem’ (1935–1940) to Stalin’s purges, defying the regime to close her “tormented mouth, through which one hundred million people scream”.

Moisey Nappelbaum
The Poet Alexander Blok
1921
Gelatin silver print
Alex Lachmann Collection, London

The Symbolist poet Blok wrote mystical verse steeped in images of beauty and decay.

He embraced the Revolution as a quasi-religious second coming, but soon became disillusioned.
When his requests to leave the Soviet Union for medical treatment were refused, the writer Maxim Gorky warned the Bolshevik leadership: “Blok is Russia’s finest poet. If you forbid him to go abroad, and he dies, you and your comrades will be guilty of his death.”

Permission was only granted several days after Blok died.

Moisey Nappelbaum
The Theatre Director Vsevolod Meyerhold
1929
Gelatin silver print
Alex Lachmann Collection, London

Meyerhold was a great experimental force in avant-garde theatre. He developed Biomechanics, an innovative method of acting in which emotions were expressed primarily through bodily movements.

(continued over)
In his plays, illusionistic scenery and staging were replaced by mechanical effects, circus and music-hall devices, and abstract costumes. He collaborated with leading figures of the avant-garde, including the composer Dmitri Shostakovich.

In 1940 Meyerhold was executed, a victim of Stalin's programme of persecution.

Film:

Vsevolod Meyerhold
Biomechanics
January 1928
Excerpt: 2 minutes 3 seconds

Meyerhold devised Biomechanics as a system of movement and gesture for acting and dance.
This first filmed demonstration features stabbing and archery. Rhythmic movements were used to indicate emotions, minimising illusion in favour of factual demonstrations of energy and tension.

This physical theatre was closely related to music hall, circus and puppetry. It became a powerful means of propaganda.

**Moisey Nappelbaum**
The Composer Dmitri Shostakovich
1930s
Gelatin silver print
Alex Lachmann Collection, London

Shostakovich is one of the most significant composers of the twentieth century. His music combines the Romantic tradition with moments of atonality and a strong element of irony.

(continued over)
He had a troubled relationship with the Soviet authorities. After Stalin attended his daring opera ‘Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District’ in 1936, Shostakovich was censured as “an enemy of the people”.

In 1948 he was denounced again, for “formalism” and “Western influences”, and much of his music was banned.

**Man Ray**

The Film Director Sergei Eisenstein

1929

Gelatin silver print

Alex Lachmann Collection, London

Eisenstein was a pioneer of Soviet film. In Moscow he worked with the avant-garde theatre director Vsevolod Meyerhold and had contact with the radical film director Dziga Vertov.
Eisenstein employed an innovative form of editing known as montage, in which independent shots collide or are superimposed. His films ‘The Battleship Potemkin’, ‘The Strike’ (both 1925) and ‘October’ (1928) are dynamic, dramatic responses to the Soviet requirement to represent the heroism of the Revolution.

Moisey Nappelbaum
The Composer Sergei Prokofiev
Late 1940s
Gelatin silver print
Alex Lachmann Collection, London

One of the greatest composers of the twentieth century, Prokofiev wrote the ballet ‘Romeo and Juliet’ (1935), the children’s musical story ‘Peter and the Wolf’ (1936) and the score to Eisenstein’s film ‘Alexander Nevsky’ (1938).
Prokofiev left Russia for the United States after the Revolution, later settling in Paris. In 1936, courted by the Soviet authorities with promises that were never kept, he returned to his homeland.

In 1948 he was forced to begin composing works glorifying the Soviet system.

**Mikhail Prekhner**

El Lissitzky

1934

Gelatin silver print

Alex Lachmann Collection, London

In this carefully composed photograph the photojournalist Prekhner employs a plunging viewpoint and raking light to bring out the dynamic V-shape of the figure and his shadow. He pays homage to Lissitzky’s own innovative geometric compositions.
El Lissitzky

Constructor (Self-portrait with Dividers)

1924

Gelatin silver print

Alex Lachmann Collection, London

Lissitzky trained as an architect-engineer and from 1922 travelled in Western Europe, meeting many of the avant-garde.

In this self-portrait he used multiple exposures and negatives to create a seamless composite image, his draughtsman’s dividers presenting him as designer, architect and engineer.

The instrument is also an ancient symbol of God as the “architect of the universe”.

This building of 1932 by Moisei Ginzburg and Ignaty Milinis marks a high point of international architecture in the Soviet Union. An experiment in communal living, it was intended to house workers in basic apartments, without kitchens, to encourage them to use the collective canteen and crèche facilities.

El Lissitzky entered the competition to produce a standard design for the apartment interiors.
El Lissitzky
Design for an Apartment for the Narkomfin [People’s Commissariat of Finance] Building, 1932
Reconstruction by Henry Milner, 2016
Wood, card, paper, metal and paint
Courtesy of Henry Milner

Lissitzky’s model of a standard apartment in the Narkomfin building is lost, but his photomontages of the design are preserved in the State Tretyakov Gallery in Moscow.

The images show that he incorporated a small cutout figure of a child, furniture and photographic city views that were visible through the windows. They also reveal the materials with which he worked, and that he precisely followed the proportions of the building.

(continued over)
Using this information Henry Milner has constructed this model to full scale, bringing to life Lissitzky’s vision. The clarity, simplicity and harmony of the spacious split-level interior perfectly embodied the new Soviet lifestyle.

**Unknown**

View of the Comintern Radio Tower in Moscow by Vladimir Shukhov from the wall of the Donskoy Monastery

1935

Photograph facsimile

© Schusev State Museum of Architecture

**Lyubov Popova**

Space-force Construction

1921

Oil, tessellation on plywood

State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow
In 1921 Popova and other Constructivists concluded that painting could not be understood by the masses. They turned instead to design, with the aim of making useful objects for the new society.

In Popova’s spatial constructions, oil paint was considered one medium among several and canvas gave way to new materials – plywood in this case.

She also designed fabrics, clothes and spectacular sets and costumes for Meyerhold’s plays, and produced radical book and poster designs.
Vasily Kandinsky
Troubled
1917
Oil on canvas
State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow

Alexander Tyshler
Formal-Colour Construction of Red
1922
Oil on canvas
State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow

Konstantin Yuon
New Planet
1921
Tempera on cardboard
State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow
Mikhail Matiushin
Movement in Space
c. 1921
Oil on canvas
State Russian Museum, St Petersburg

Central display

Ivan Puni
Spectrum: Flight of Forms
1919
Oil on canvas
State Russian Museum, St Petersburg
Sofya Dymshits-Tolstaya
Propaganda Glass “Labour is the Foundation of the RSFSR [Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic]”
1919–1921
Oil on glass
State Russian Museum, St Petersburg

Sofya Dymshits-Tolstaya
Propaganda Glass “Peace to the Sheds, War on the Palaces”
1919–1921
Oil on glass
State Russian Museum, St Petersburg
Sofya Dymshits-Tolstaya
Propaganda Glass “Workers of the World, Unite!”
1919–1921
Oil on glass
State Russian Museum, St Petersburg

Dymshits-Tolstaya’s propaganda paintings were unconventional in their use of glass. They link images of workers’ tools with fragments of slogans from the early revolutionary years.

The Russian word-fragments here – strana (country) and proletariat (proletariat) – are from Marx’s phrase “Workers of the World, Unite!”

Dymshits-Tolstaya later painted realistic Soviet portraits.
Pavel Filonov
Heads (Human in the World)
1925–1926
Oil on paper mounted on canvas
State Russian Museum, St Petersburg

Pavel Filonov
Formula of the Petrograd Proletariat
1920–1921
Oil on canvas
State Russian Museum, St Petersburg

In Filonov’s complex paintings, figures reveal smaller, even more detailed images, a method that he referred to as “universal flowering”. His images seem to emerge from the flow of memory, representing ancestors, folklore and urban groups. He called this synthesis of social elements a “formula”.

(continued over)
Later, under pressure from the Soviet authorities, Filonov worked in a highly realistic style. He died of starvation during the Nazis’ siege of Leningrad in 1941.

**Pavel Filonov**
Formula of Spring
1927–1929
Oil on canvas
State Russian Museum, St Petersburg

**Vasily Kandinsky**
Blue Crest
1917
Oil on canvas
State Russian Museum, St Petersburg
Boris Grigoriev
Commissar (People’s Commissar Anatoly Lunacharsky)
1921
Oil on canvas
Alex Lachmann Collection, London

In 1917 Lunacharsky became the first Soviet Commissar (Minister) of Public Enlightenment – Lenin’s “cultural ambassador”.

He was a prolific writer and art critic who supported the avant-garde as well as defending artistic pluralism. He was responsible for increased literacy in Russia and for the protection of historic buildings threatened by the Bolshevik Party.

When Stalin consolidated his power in the late 1920s, Lunacharsky lost all his important positions.
Yury Annenkov
Portrait of the Theatre Director
Vsevolod Meyerhold
1922
Pencil on paper
The Petr Aven Collection

Aristarkh Lentulov
Portrait of the Theatre Director
Alexander Tairov
1918–1919
Oil on canvas
State Russian Museum, St Petersburg

Alexander Tairov was an experimental theatre director who produced classical plays but borrowed techniques from contemporary cabaret and Indian and Japanese performance.
Alexander Golovin
Portrait of the Theatre Director Vsevolod Meyerhold
1917
Oil on canvas
The St Petersburg State Museum of Theatre and Music

Vladimir Kozlinsky
Despite the Best Efforts of Our Enemies over Three Years the World Revolution Proceeds with Gigantic Steps!
1920
Poster reproduction
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Revolution
Russian Art 1917 – 1932

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Audio tour

Main commentary

Descriptive commentary

Kazimir Malevich: introduction to this gallery
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Key to 1932 Malevich Re-hang

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Malevich Re-hang

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Kazimir Malevich

Kazimir Malevich was a leading painter of the Russian avant-garde.

A pioneer of geometric abstraction, he was a mystic who believed that art should express spirituality. In 1915 Malevich invented Suprematism, a purely abstract style epitomised by his ‘Black Square’, which he said represented the “zero of form”.

The painting became a symbol of the new art.

In the late 1920s Malevich’s abstract paintings were denounced by the Soviet authorities, for whom they failed to express social realities. But in 1932 he was invited to hang a room of his own works in the exhibition ‘Fifteen Years of Artists of the Russian Soviet Republic’ at the State Russian Museum in Leningrad.
This gallery presents an almost exact re-creation of that display. ‘Red Square (Pictorial Realism of a Peasant Woman in Two Dimensions)’ and ‘Black Square’ (a later version of the 1915 original) occupy the centre.

Complex Suprematist canvases are exhibited with Malevich’s later, more figurative paintings, in which blank faces hauntingly evoke lost identity on the collective farm. These were Malevich’s attempt to conform to the Soviet dogma that required art to be representational.

On an altar-like table he assembled **arkhitektoniki** (architectons), radical prototypes of buildings without doors or windows. The smaller architectons here are the plaster originals and the larger models are reconstructions.
Malevich put a figure on top of the tallest architecton, which was displayed against a colourful Suprematist painting – an image of Soviet man caught up in a dynamic vision of the cosmos.

Opposite the re-created display are works by Malevich’s followers Nikolai Suetin and Ilya Chashnik, who made beautiful ceramics for the State Porcelain Factory using designs for everyday objects derived from Malevich’s art.
Kazimir Malevich

Desk and Room

1913

Oil on canvas

On loan from a private collection

In his early work Malevich experimented with different styles, from Symbolism to Fauvism, Cubism and Futurism. This painting is one of the most important demonstrations of his investigation of Cubist and Futurist analyses of form and space.

Malevich’s tireless exploration of styles eventually concluded with the movement that he called Suprematism.
Unknown
Malevich with His Display at the Exhibition ‘Fifteen Years of Artists of the Russian Soviet Republic’, State Russian Museum, Leningrad
1932–1933
Photograph facsimile
© Photo collection of V. Tsarenkov

Ivan Klyun
Non-objective Painting According to the Principle of Light-Colour
1921
Oil on cardboard
State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow
Ilya Chashnik
Suprematism
1924–1925
Oil on canvas
State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow

Ivan Klyun
Composition
1920
Oil on cardboard
State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow

Display case 1

Kazimir Malevich
Plate with Suprematist Design
1923
Enamel paint on porcelain
The Petr Aven Collection
Kazimir Malevich
Plate with Suprematist Design: Dynamic Composition
1923
Enamel paint on porcelain
The Petr Aven Collection

Display case 2

Nikolai Suetin
State Porcelain Factory, Leningrad
Coffee Pot
1925
Enamel paint on porcelain
The Petr Aven Collection
Nikolai Suetin
State Porcelain Factory, Petrograd
Plate with Suprematist Design
1923
Enamel paint on porcelain
The Petr Aven Collection

Ilya Chashnik
State Porcelain Factory, Petrograd
Plate with Suprematist Design
1923
Enamel paint on porcelain
The Petr Aven Collection
Nikolai Suetin
State Porcelain Factory, Petrograd
Suprematist Inkwell (with a Disc) with Removable Cover
1923
Enamel paint on porcelain, gilding, etching on gold
The Petr Aven Collection

Display case 3

Nikolai Suetin
State Porcelain Factory, Petrograd
Cup and Saucer with Suprematist Design
1923
Enamel paint on porcelain
The Petr Aven Collection
Nikolai Suetin
State Porcelain Factory, Leningrad
Plate with a Woman Depicted in a Suprematist Manner
1934
Enamel paint on porcelain
The Petr Aven Collection

Nikolai Suetin
State Porcelain Factory, Leningrad
Plate Depicting Three Silhouettes
1929
Paint on glazed porcelain
The Petr Aven Collection
Nikolai Suetin
State Porcelain Factory, Leningrad
Vase with Ornamental Suprematist Elements
1930
Vitrified enamel paint on porcelain
The Petr Aven Collection
Key to 1932 Malevich Re-hang of his display at the exhibition ‘Fifteen Years of Artists of the Russian Soviet Republic’, State Russian Museum, Leningrad, 1932

1. Sportsmen
1930–1931
Oil on canvas
State Russian Museum, St Petersburg

2. The Red House
1932
Oil on canvas
State Russian Museum, St Petersburg
3 Female Torso
1928–1929
Oil on plywood
State Russian Museum, St Petersburg

4 Female Portrait
1928–1929
Oil on plywood
State Russian Museum, St Petersburg

5 Torso (Prototype of a New Image)
1928–1929
Oil on canvas
State Russian Museum, St Petersburg

6 Black Square
1932
Oil on canvas
The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg
7 Red Square
(Painterly Realism of a Peasant Woman in Two Dimensions)
1915
Oil on canvas
State Russian Museum, St Petersburg

8 Suprematism
1915–1916
Oil on canvas
State Russian Museum, St Petersburg

9 Dynamic Suprematism
Supremus
c. 1915
Oil on canvas
Tate: Purchased with assistance from the Friends of the Tate Gallery 1978
Tate have generously lent this painting to the exhibition in place of ‘Supremus 56’ (1916–1917), which could not be available for loan.
10 Suprematism (Supremus No.58)  
1916  
Oil on canvas  
State Russian Museum, St Petersburg

11 Peasants  
c. 1930  
Oil on canvas  
State Russian Museum, St Petersburg

12 Landscape with Five Houses  
1928–1929  
Oil on canvas  
State Russian Museum, St Petersburg

13 Three Female Figures  
c. 1930  
Oil on canvas  
State Russian Museum, St Petersburg
14 Red Cavalry
c. 1932
Oil on canvas
State Russian Museum, St Petersburg

15 To Reaping (Marfa and Vanka)
1928–1929
Oil on canvas
State Russian Museum, St Petersburg

16 Suprematistic Construction of Colours
1928–1929
Oil on plywood
State Russian Museum, St Petersburg
17 Woman with Rake
1930–1932
Oil on canvas
State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow

18 Architectons and Figurines
Late 1920s
Plaster
Collection of Vladimir Tsarenkov

19 Architectons and Figurines
Late 1920s
Reconstruction by Henry Milner 2016
Modelboard, clay and paint
Courtesy of Henry Milner
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12. Fate of the Peasants: introduction to this gallery


14. Kazimir Malevich, Head of a Peasant, 1928–1929
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Fate of the Peasants

When the Bolsheviks came to power in 1917, they promised the peasants ownership of the land, a pledge that they had no intention of keeping.

The devastating effects of the Civil War (1917–1922) and the catastrophic famine and drought that followed left many peasants with no means of survival.

After the Revolution, the peasants had been promoted as equal partners with industrial workers, symbolised by the hammer and sickle of the Soviet emblem. But the industrialisation of agriculture could not be achieved with the old methods. The image of industry embracing agriculture was undermined by hunger and empty fields.

Stalin’s first Five-year Plan (1928) introduced collectivisation, combining farms into ever-larger agricultural communes (Kolkhozy).
Villagers were uprooted from their homes and their ancient way of life was wiped out. Desperate peasants destroyed their stock and equipment in protest, but over half the nation’s farms were collectivised and famine returned.

Malevich captured the peasants’ loss of identity in his figures with featureless faces, but painting, photography, film and journals of the period mostly celebrated Soviet prosperity in images of golden wheat fields, happy peasants and gleaming new tractors – utopian visions of a future to be reached through hard work.

In fact, millions died.
List of works (clockwise in order of hang)

Boris Grigoriev
Old Dairy Woman
1917
Oil on canvas
State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow

Alexei Pakhomov
Reaper (Harvest)
1928
Oil on canvas
State Russian Museum, St Petersburg
Ivan Lebedev and S. N. Ridman
All-Union Agricultural Exhibition, Moscow
1923
Poster
Alex Lachmann Collection, London

The All-Union Agricultural Exhibition was a massive propaganda exercise, to which peasants were brought to admire plentiful produce from throughout the Soviet Union, displayed in wooden pavilions.

The reality of Soviet agriculture was in fact much bleaker.
Sergey Burylin
Tractor
Late 1920s
Roller print on calico
State Russian Museum, St Petersburg

Dmitry Moor
Help!
1921
Poster reproduction
© Universal History Archive/UIG/ Bridgeman Images

Boris Ignatovich
Reading the Newspaper at the Collective Farm
1930
Gelatin silver print
Alex Lachmann Collection, London
Arkady Shaiket

Lenin’s Lamp: Light Bulb in a Peasant House
1925
Gelatin silver print
Alex Lachmann Collection, London

Georgi Zelma

Brigade Meeting on the Collective Farm
1929
Gelatin silver print
Alex Lachmann Collection, London

Arkady Shaiket

Electrification of Lapatino Village
1925
Gelatin silver print
Alex Lachmann Collection, London
Grigory Ryazhsky
The Collective Farm Team Leader
1932
Oil on canvas
State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow

Pavel Filonov
Collective Farm Worker
1931
Oil on canvas
State Russian Museum, St Petersburg

The granite-like face and expressionless eyes of this anonymous farm worker convey a stoical resignation to his fate. Behind him are the buildings of the collective farm.
Konstantin Rozhdestvensky

Family in a Field
1932
Oil on cardboard
State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow

Alexei Pakhomov

Portrait of Shock-worker, Molodtsova
1931
Oil on canvas
State Russian Museum, St Petersburg

Alexei Pakhomov

Haymaking
1925
Oil on canvas
State Russian Museum, St Petersburg
Central display

Boris Grigoriev
Land of Peasants
1917
Oil on canvas
State Russian Museum, St Petersburg

Kazimir Malevich
Head of a Peasant
1928–1929
Oil on plywood
State Russian Museum, St Petersburg

Malevich painted this peasant’s face and beard in bright red and white geometric sections.
In the background, peasants are working in a line in the fields. Strips of different crops stretch to the horizon, as colourful and decorative as patchwork, while aeroplanes fly overhead in a metallic sky.

On this large collective farm, the old way of life is transformed by the new.

**Nikolai Suetin**

A Woman with a Saw  
c. 1920  
Oil on wood  
State Russian Museum, St Petersburg
Display case 1

Unknown
Kolkhoz Box
c. 1923
Lacquer, tempera and gold paint on paper mâché
The Petr Aven Collection

After the Revolution the Bolsheviks eradicated the Russian Orthodox Church.

In response, icon painters adapted their refined techniques, combined with influences from Japanese lacquer work and Russian folk art, to produce new Soviet images for papier-mâché trays and boxes like the one displayed here, which shows a scene on a collective farm.

This miniature painting technique is known as Palekh, after the village where it originated.
Vladimir Maslov
Tractor
1925
Ornamental chintz, cotton fabric
The Burilin Ivanovo Museum of Local History, Ivanovo

Natalia Danko
State Porcelain Factory, Leningrad
Dancer
1929

Naum Kongiser
State Porcelain Factory, Leningrad
A Radio for the Village
1927
Natalia Danko

On Guard: Women’s Watch
1938

Enamel paint on porcelain
The Petr Aven Collection

Natalia Danko depicts a young peasant woman turning in a rhythmic folk dance, keeping alive a timeless Russian identity.

Peasant women also protected the crops, as Danko’s other item here shows.

In the third porcelain piece, a young Communist of the Pioneer movement, recognisable by his red scarf, teaches a bearded old peasant how to use headphones to hear Radio Moscow
Elizaveta Rozendorf
State Porcelain Factory, Petrograd
Dish Depicting a Girl with a Pumpkin
1920
Enamel paint on porcelain
The Petr Aven Collection

Elizaveta Rozendorf
State Porcelain Factory, Petrograd
Dish Depicting a Reaper
1920
Enamel paint on porcelain
The Petr Aven Collection
Sergei Chekhonin
Proletariat Porcelain
and Faience Factory,
Bronnitsa

Plate Depicting a Great Star with
a Sheaf of Corn, Inscribed: “Who
Is Not With Us Is Against Us”
1922

Vitrified enamel paint on porcelain

The Petr Aven Collection
Display case 2

Ivan Ivanovich Riznich
State Porcelain Factory, Leningrad
Large Vase with Peasant Dance
1929
Vitrified enamel paint on porcelain
The Petr Aven Collection

Films:

Sergei Eisenstein and Grigori Alexandrov
The Old and the New
1929
Produced by Sovkino
Excerpt: 2 minutes 24 seconds
Originally commissioned to make a film about
the collectivisation of agriculture, Eisenstein only returned to this project after making ‘October’ (1928), by which time Stalin’s agricultural policy had changed.

Mechanisation became the new theme of this film, with the heroine Marfa championing a cream-separator and the traditional scythe challenged by harvesting machinery.

**Alexander Dovzhenko**

**Earth**

1930

Produced by VUFKU

Excerpt: 54 seconds

In this poetic drama the Ukrainian-born Dovzhenko portrayed the attitudes of different generations towards the changes in village life. In this excerpt the arrival of the first tractor is greeted with incredulity and exultation.
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Revolution
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Eternal Russia: introduction to this gallery

Marc Chagall, Window over a Garden, 1917

Boris Kustodiev, Carnival, 1919

Anna Golubkina, Birch Tree, 1927
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Eternal Russia

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, they pleaded for the retention of the Orthodox faith and argued for the preservation of churches and the traditional peasant culture threatened by collectivisation.

In lyrical paintings and beautifully decorated art journals, artists expressed their longing for a country that no longer existed.
List of works (clockwise in order of hang)

Marc Chagall
Window over a Garden
1917
Oil on paper mounted on cardboard
The Russian Academy of Fine Arts Museum, St Petersburg

Aristarkh Lentulov
Gates with Tower: New Jerusalem
1917
Oil on canvas
State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow
Aristarkh Lentulov
Tverskoy Boulevard
1917
Oil on canvas
State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow

Known in Paris as the “Cubiste à la Russe”, Lentulov was a major figure of the pre-revolutionary avant-garde.

This exuberant composition depicts the cathedral of the Strastnoy Convent on Tverskoy Boulevard, Moscow. The toppling structure and anxious faces of the passers-by, overlooked by a statue of the great Russian writer Alexander Pushkin, introduce a disquieting note.

In 1919 the convent was closed, reopening in 1928 as an anti-religious museum; it was eventually demolished in 1937.
Boris Kustodiev
Carnival
1919
Oil on canvas
The Russian Academy of Fine Arts Museum,
St Petersburg

Konstantin Yuon
The Day of Annunciation
1922
Oil on canvas
State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow

Mikhail Nesterov
Philosophers
1917
Oil on canvas
State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow
Nesterov wanted to express the spiritual values of pre-revolutionary Russia.

This double portrait depicts two major Russian philosophers: Pavel Florensky (in white), a priest and mathematician known as the “Russian Leonardo da Vinci”, and the theologian and economist Sergei Bulgakov.

They are walking in the grounds of Russia’s most sacred monastery, Troitse-Sergievskaia Lavra.

Bulgakov was expelled from Russia in 1922, along with other prominent intellectuals, on one of the so-called “philosophers’ ships”; Florensky was arrested in 1933 and shot in 1937.

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**Marc Chagall**

*Promenade*

1917–1918

Oil on canvas

State Russian Museum, St Petersburg

(continued over)
Here Chagall celebrates the joy of his marriage. Of his wife Bella, he later wrote: “She has flown over my pictures for many years, guiding my art.”

The setting is Chagall’s hometown of Vitebsk, where he founded an art school and was Commissar of Arts. The work’s spirit of freedom and hope echoes Chagall’s optimism at the time of the Revolution, but in 1922, disillusioned and poor, he left Russia permanently for France.

Vasily Baksheev
Blue Spring
1930
Oil on wood
State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow
Igor Grabar
By the Lake
1926
Oil on canvas
State Russian Museum, St Petersburg

Filip Maliavin
Troika
1933
Oil on canvas
Private collection

Display case 1

Jar-Ptitza (Firebird)
1922–1926
Berlin, Dr Selle & Co
14 issues, bound in two volumes
Alex Lachmann Collection, London

(continued over)
Published in Berlin from 1921 to 1927, the monthly art and literature journal ‘Jar-Ptitza’ was prominent among the many publications produced abroad for the large Russian émigré population. Drawing on the rich traditions of Russian fairy tales and folk art, the magazine’s vibrant images of onion-domed churches, castles and snow-covered carriages encapsulated the nostalgic longing that many émigrés felt for pre-revolutionary Russia.

Display case 2

Anna Golubkina

Birch Tree
1927

Bronze

State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow
Films:

Grigory Kozintsev and Leonid Trauberg
The Youth of Maxim
1935
Produced by Lenfilm, USSR
Excerpt: 1 minute

This story of a young worker becoming a Bolshevik in pre-revolutionary St Petersburg begins with a rousing evocation of New Year’s Eve celebrations, accompanied by music by the young Shostakovich.

Kozintsev’s and Trauberg’s film proved so popular that Maxim returned in two sequels.
Olga Preobrazhenskaya and Ivan Pravov
Women of Ryazan
1927
Produced by Sovkino, USSR
Excerpt: 57 seconds

The actress turned director Preobrazhenskaya showed the traditional customs of Soviet village life in a series of films, starting with this portrayal of women’s lives in provincial Ryazan before and after the Revolution.
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New City, New Society: introduction to this gallery

Eduard Alma Tenisman, Worker Seated at the Table, 1927

54 Plate with Inscription “He Who Will Not Work Shall Not Eat, 1921”

Diagram: “The Quantity of Products Given to the Citizens in Exchange for Coupons…”, 1920s

55 Alexander Samokhvalov, Tram Conductor, 1928

Solomon Telingater, Red Army: First Cavalry, c. 1928
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New City, New Society: War Communism

War Communism was the austere economic and political programme introduced by the Bolsheviks during the Civil War (1917–1922) with the aim of keeping the cities and the Red Army supplied with food and weapons.

In the hands of inexperienced workers and soldiers, the economy and urban infrastructure collapsed and great hardship ensued.

Private enterprise was banned, industries were nationalised and most banks closed down. Food and fuel supplies quickly ran out, propaganda posters filling the windows of empty shops.

In January 1918 electricity was cut off and the trams stopped. Sewage disposal failed, which led to epidemics of disease. The state monetary system foundered and strictly rationed food coupons were issued and distributed according to people’s class.
To make matters worse, the starving citizens of Petrograd were not allowed to leave the city. Their only chance of escape was to join the Red Army.
List of works (clockwise in order of hang)

Eduard Alma
Tenisman
Worker Seated at the Table
1927
Oil on canvas
The State Museum of the History of St Petersburg

Unknown
Food Coupon of the 2nd Category for July in the name of Felkergam [Felkerzam] A.
1920s
Offset printing and handwriting on paper
On 21 November 1918 the All-Bolshevik Council of the People’s Commissars (SOVNARKOM) banned the commercial sale of food and introduced a system of rationing in which food was allocated according to social status.

In the highest category were workers and government leaders, who were allowed half a pound of bread per day. Public servants were entitled to quarter of a pound of bread, the bourgeoisie one eighth of a pound and, finally, dependents were given one sixteenth of a pound.
Unknown
Voucher for Use of the Bathhouse of North-western Railways in the Name of Gorshkov A. [H.]
1922
Typographical printing and handwriting on paper
The State Museum of the History of St Petersburg

Vladimir Lebedev
Food Tax Poster. Give a Part of the Harvest to the City, and Keep the Rest
1921
Linocut
The State Museum of the History of St Petersburg
This design for a food coupon was produced by Tseitlin, a student of Malevich, in a Suprematist style.

Since artists belonged to the third category in the rationing system, the bourgeoisie, and were entitled only to a very small amount of bread, Tseitlin ironically designed special coupons for avant-garde artists, incorporating letters and numbers in abstract compositions.
Unknown
Advertisement “Of Course, Cream-soda!”
1926
Chromolithograph (1st state) on paper
The State Museum of the History of St Petersburg

Unknown
Calendar for 1922 after a Drawing by Boris Kustodiev
1921
Chromolithograph on paper
The State Museum of the History of St Petersburg
Unknown
Poster for the Commercial and Industrial Companies of Petrograd 1922
Chromolithograph on paper
The State Museum of the History of St Petersburg

Unknown
Restaurant Menu
After June 1924
Oil on plywood
The State Museum of the History of St Petersburg

Alexander Rodchenko
Mercedes Ambulance Car 1929
Gelatin silver print
Alex Lachmann Collection, London
Arkady Shaiket
In the Café
1920
Gelatin silver print
Alex Lachmann Collection, London

Alexander Rodchenko
Cigarette Vendor, Pushkin Square, Moscow
1926
Gelatin silver print
Alex Lachmann Collection, London
New City, New Society: New Economic Policy (NEP)

A naval revolt against the Bolsheviks in Kronstadt in 1921 and insurrections throughout the country forced Lenin to replace the failed policy of War Communism with the New Economic Policy (NEP).

He saw this “state capitalism” as an interim, emergency measure to save the economy, and insisted that it was different from all other forms of capitalism. Peasants were allowed to sell their produce freely once more, and private trade and the leasing of enterprises were also permitted.

As a result, the shop shelves were stocked again, restaurants reopened and city life regained its vibrancy.
Artists recorded the range of new citizens created by the NEP, from the well-dressed bourgeoisie to severe political agitators. Posters advertised consumer goods and entertainments such as the cinema.

The “Roaring Twenties” had come to the Soviet Union – for a while.

In 1928 Stalin replaced the NEP with Central Planning and announced the first of his Five-year Plans, with the aim of achieving full industrialisation through absolute state monopoly.

Georgy Petrusov
New Building
1931
Gelatin silver print
Alex Lachmann Collection, London
Eleazar Langman
Old and New: Church and Universal Store
1930–1931
Gelatin silver print
Alex Lachmann Collection, London

Georgy Petrusov
New Building from Above (Kharkov)
1930
Gelatin silver print
Alex Lachmann Collection, London

Izrail Lizak
Walk
1928
Oil on canvas
State Russian Museum, St Petersburg

(continued over)
Lizak was famous for his street scenes and in the 1920s claimed that the street was his sole source of inspiration.

In this semi-abstract painting of parading glamorous women, he captured the colour and energy of urban spectacle during the relatively prosperous years of the New Economic Policy.

Alexander Samokhvalov
Tram Conductor
1928
Tempera on canvas
State Russian Museum, St Petersburg

The rapid changes in urban society in this period were particularly evident in the role of women. This formidable conductress selling tickets is a goddess of the new world.
Illuminated by flashes of electric light, she dominates the futuristic interior of the tram.

Samokhvalov explained: “the colossal, terrible force of electricity – previously only considered subordinate to Elijah the prophet and Zeus the thunderer – is now subordinated to a simple woman worker”.

Alexander Labas
Red Army Soldier in the Russian Far East
1928
Oil on canvas
State Russian Museum, St Petersburg

In the late 1920s Labas produced an extensive series of works dedicated to soldiers in the east of the Soviet Union. The paintings have the immediacy of reportage.
Here he captures the loneliness and sense of alienation experienced by a soldier who returns to a large city, such as Vladivostok, after fighting on the battlefield.

**Sofya Dymshits-Tolstaya**

*Woman Agitator*

1931

Oil on canvas

State Russian Museum, St Petersburg

**Vladimir Lebedev**

*Portrait of the Dancer and Choreographer Nadezhda Nadezhdina*

1927

Oil on canvas

State Russian Museum, St Petersburg
Vladimir Stenberg and Georgi Stenberg
Poster for the Moscow Kamerny [Chamber] Theatre European Tour
1923
Poster reproduction
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Alexander Rodchenko
Beer against Poteen! (Advertisement for Three Hills Beer for Mosselprom Department Store, Moscow)
1923
Poster reproduction
© Heritage Image Partnership Ltd/Alamy Stock.
© Rodchenko & Stepanova Archive, DACS, RAO 2017
Alexander Rodchenko (design) and Vladimir Mayakovsky (text)

Workers: High Prices and NEP Don’t Scare Us (Advertisement for Bread for Mosselprom Department Store, Moscow)
1923

Poster reproduction
© Fine Art Images, Germany. © DACS 2017

Vladimir Stenberg and Georgi Stenberg

Poster for the Film ‘The Three Million Case’
1926

Poster reproduction
© GRAD: Gallery for Russian Arts and Design, London
Dmitri Bulanov
Advertisements in the Tram are Read Every Day by Millions of People
1927
Poster reproduction
© Fine Art Images, Germany

Unknown
Advertisement for the Russian Release of Walter Ruttmann’s Film ‘Berlin: Symphony of a Great City’
1928
Poster reproduction
© Christie’s Images/Bridgeman Images. © DACS 2017
Solomon Telingater
Red Army: First Cavalry (collage 2)
c. 1928
Photomontage, paper, card and gouache
Alex Lachmann Collection, London

Vladimir Lebedev
The Red Vision of Communism is Brushing over Europe
1923
Russian Telegraph Agency (ROSTA) poster reproduction
© Pictures from History/Bridgeman Images.
© DACS 2017
Vladimir Lebedev
The New Bourgeoisie in the Republic of Labour (A Threat to the Proletarian State)
1923
Russian Telegraph Agency (ROSTA) poster reproduction
© Pictures from History/Bridgeman Images.
© DACS 2017

Vladimir Lebedev
The Struggle against Sales in the Streets
c. 1920
Russian Telegraph Agency (ROSTA) poster reproduction
© Pictures from History/Bridgeman Images.
© DACS 2017
Alexander Deineka

Ping-pong
1928
Gouache and watercolour on paper
Alex Lachmann Collection, London

Unknown

Diagram “The Quantity of Products Given to the Citizens in Exchange for Coupons in Canteens and other Establishments in Petrograd and the Suburbs in 1919, 1920 and 1921”
1920s
Ink, pen and watercolour on paper mounted on cardboard
The State Museum of the History of St Petersburg
Unknown
Diagram “The Quantity of Food for Children in Petrograd (January–October 1918)’’
1920s
Coloured ink, pen and watercolour on paper mounted on cardboard
The State Museum of the History of St Petersburg

Unknown
Diagram “In One Year a Mature Man Consumes Approximately...”
1920s
Ink and pen on paper mounted on cardboard
The State Museum of the History of St Petersburg
David Shterenberg

Aniska
1926
Oil on canvas
State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow

Shterenberg spent part of his early career in Paris in the circle of Modigliani and Chagall. Returning to Russia in 1917, he soon became involved in implementing Soviet cultural policy as head of the Department of Visual Arts in the People’s Commissariat of Enlightenment (NARKOMPROS).

In this painting, a young girl stands in a stark interior. A half loaf of bread, the only frugal provision, powerfully evokes the deprivation of the post-revolutionary years.
Display case 1

Natalia Danko
State Porcelain Factory, Petrograd
Woman Worker Making a Speech
1923
Vitrified enamel paint on porcelain
The Petr Aven Collection

Alisa Brusketti-Mitrokhina
State Porcelain Factory, Petrograd
Bourgeois Woman Selling Her Possessions
1918
Enamel paint on porcelain
The Petr Aven Collection
Alexandra Shchekotikhina-Pototskaya State Porcelain Factory, Petrograd

Dish with the inscription “Sailor’s Walk. 1 May 1921 in Petrograd”

1921

Enamel paint on porcelain, silvering, gilding, etching

The Petr Aven Collection
Display case 2

Alexandra Shchekotikhina-Pototskaya

Dish with the inscription “Commissar”

1921

Enamel paint on porcelain

The Petr Aven Collection
Vasili Timorev
State Porcelain Factory, Petrograd
Plate Depicting Identity Papers and Work Papers Surrounded with a Red Banner Inscribed “He Who Works Shall Eat”
1920
Enamel paint on porcelain, gilding
The Petr Aven Collection
Alexandra Shchekotikhina-Pototskaya
State Porcelain Factory, Petrograd
Plate with the Inscription “He Who Will Not Work Shall Not Eat 1921”
1921
Enamel paint on porcelain, underglaze cover in cobalt, gilding
The Petr Aven Collection
Films:

Yakov Protazanov

Aelita
1924

Produced by Mezhrabpom, USSR
Excerpt: 1 minute 24 seconds

Best known for its Cubo-Futurist dream sequences set on Mars, ‘Aelita’ actually begins in starving Moscow in 1921. Refugees from the Civil War arrive by train, one of whom tries to bribe an official in charge of allocating housing. Many famous posters of the period appear in situ.
Boris Barnet
The House on Trubnaya Street
1928
Produced by Mezhrabpom, USSR
Excerpt: 1 minute 20 seconds

In Barnet’s witty satire on the emerging class structure of Soviet Russia we see the morning routine of a communal tenement, with diverse households spilling onto the staircase and showing scant regard for their neighbours.

Fridrikh Ermler
Fragment of an Empire
1929
Produced by Sovkino, USSR
Excerpt: 1 minute 26 seconds
In Ermier’s psychological treatment of the meaning of revolution, a First World War soldier suffering from shell-shock regains his memory and returns, bewildered, to St Petersburg – now Leningrad, full of mysterious new statues and bustling with sophistication.
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Molly Bretton, Access Manager
Revolution
Russian Art 1917 – 1932

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Kuzma Petrov-Vodkin: introduction to this gallery

Kuzma Petrov-Vodkin, Portrait of a Boy (Vasya), 1921

Kuzma Petrov-Vodkin, Midday. Summer, 1917

Kuzma Petrov-Vodkin, Around the Samovar, 1926
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Kuzma Petrov-Vodkin

The painter Kuzma Petrov-Vodkin was born in a small village on the Volga River. His ancestors were bandits and according to family legend his surname derives from the vodka produced by his grandmother.

He grew up among Old Believers (the unreformed branch of the Russian Orthodox Church).

As a young man Petrov-Vodkin studied Russian icons and fresco painting, and in 1902 he travelled to Munich, where he attended classes in the studio of one of Kandinsky’s teachers.

His travels took him to Italy, where he was deeply influenced by early Renaissance painting, and to Paris, where he discovered the art of Gauguin and other Post-Impressionists.
On his return to Russia in 1908, Petrov-Vodkin developed a unique style of painting based on elliptical space or “spherical perspective”, often employing a curved horizon line that took account of multiple viewpoints and spatial progression through time.

This innovative use of space influenced avant-garde film directors and photographers.

Petrov-Vodkin supported the Revolution, which he saw as a cathartic force, and designed hoardings and murals for Lenin’s Plan for Monumental Propaganda. He became highly respected and in 1932 was appointed President of the Leningrad Regional Union of Soviet Artists (LOSSKh).

Like Malevich, he was given his own room in the seminal exhibition ‘Fifteen Years of Artists of the Russian Soviet Republic’, although there is no exact record of the works displayed.
Ultimately, however, his art is metaphysical rather than political, a reflection of the human spirit and the cycle of life. In his paintings he celebrated the “optical magic” that he perceived in the world.
List of works (clockwise in order of hang)

Kuzma Petrov-Vodkin

Portait of a Boy (Vasya)
1921
Oil on canvas
The Petr Aven Collection

Kuzma Petrov-Vodkin

Still-life with Glass, Fruit and Photograph
1924
Oil on canvas
The Petr Aven Collection
Kuzma Petrov-Vodkin

Midday. Summer
1917
Oil on canvas
State Russian Museum, St Petersburg

This idyllic view of the Russian countryside on a summer day was painted in the year of the Revolution. It represents the funeral of the artist’s father. The quiet scene is shown from above and its elliptical space suggests the cycle of life rather than a single moment.

Kuzma Petrov-Vodkin

Cherry Blossom in a Glass
1932
Oil on canvas
State Russian Museum, St Petersburg
Kuzma Petrov-Vodkin

Still-life with a Herring

1918

Oil on oilcloth, mounted on canvas
State Russian Museum, St Petersburg

This still-life registers the lack of food in post-revolutionary Petrograd, when bread, potatoes and herring constituted the meagre diet of most citizens. Due to a shortage of canvas, the painting was originally executed on oilcloth (and later mounted on canvas). Petrov-Vodkin rendered each of the objects with reverence and wonder. The potatoes are heavy on the pink tablecloth, while the herring scales shimmer like precious stones on the blue paper.
Kuzma Petrov-Vodkin
Still-life with a Violin
1918
Oil on canvas
State Russian Museum, St Petersburg

Petrov-Vodkin was a gifted, semi-professional violinist. In this still-life the solid form and rich, dark tones of the violin are foils for the translucent scene beyond the window.

Inspired by Novgorod icons, Petrov-Vodkin based his compositions on three pure colours: yellow, red and blue.

Kuzma Petrov-Vodkin
1918 in Petrograd (Petrograd Madonna)
1920
Oil on canvas
State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow

(continued over)
This painting is dedicated to one of the most challenging years in post-revolutionary Petrograd, when the austere conditions were turning people against revolutionary ideology. The mother and child are above the turmoil, symbolising purity and goodness.

This recurring theme in Petrov-Vodkin’s work reveals his love of Giotto and Fra Angelico, as well as Russian icons. Still and pellucid, the figures exude a sense of the eternal, which made this image a celebrated “icon” of the new Russia.

Kuzma Petrov-Vodkin
Morning Still-life
1918
Oil on canvas
State Russian Museum, St Petersburg
Kuzma Petrov-Vodkin

Around the Samovar
1926
Oil on canvas
State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow

Kuzma Petrov-Vodkin

Fantasy
1925
Oil on canvas
State Russian Museum, St Petersburg

Here Petrov-Vodkin returned to the subject of a famous earlier work, ‘The Bathing of the Red Horse’ (1912; State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow). The red horse was a traditional Russian symbol of change and red was the colour of the Revolution.
After Lenin’s death in 1924, many felt that revolutionary ideals had died with him. This magnificent horse flies over the troubled world, but its rider looks back rather than forward to the future.

Kuzma Petrov-Vodkin

After Battle
1923
Oil on canvas
The Central Armed Forces Museum of Russian Federation

Kuzma Petrov-Vodkin

Death of a Commissar
1927
Oil on canvas
State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow

(continued over)
In this painting Petrov-Vodkin looks back to the Civil War (1917–1922) and treats the universal theme of human sacrifice. The work was thought to reflect the artist’s disillusionment at the death of revolutionary ideals and was banned from exhibition by Soviet officials.

**Kuzma Petrov-Vodkin**

Self-portrait

1918

Oil on canvas

State Russian Museum, St Petersburg

**In the tunnel**

**Vladimir Krinsky**

At the Parade

1925

Reproduction by Andrew Davidson, 2016, of an illustration for the magazine ‘Spotlight’

© The Schusev State Museum of Architecture, Moscow
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Stalin’s Utopia: introduction to this gallery

Alexander Deineka, Race, 1932

(2 labels) Boris Ignatovich, Demonstration, 1927

Boris Ignatovich, May Day, Red Square, Moscow, 1927

Boris Iofan, Palace of the Soviets, 1932
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Room of Memory

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Stalin’s Utopia

Joseph Stalin’s utopian vision for a politically unified Soviet Union crystallised around 1932, and from this time until his death in 1953 his leadership was unopposed.

Military parades promoted a strong, coherent political identity. It was felt that sport, like marching, was a physical discipline that would make the country great and perfect the bodies of its citizens.

Paintings like Alexander Deineka’s ‘Race’ are thus full of political intention.

The exhibition “Fifteen Years of Artists of the Russian Soviet Republic” in 1932, designed to celebrate artistic liberty and progress, was in fact the last call for freedom of the arts.
After this point, avant-garde art was suppressed. Within a year, it had vanished, locked in cupboards and storerooms.

Henceforward, the Union of Soviet Artists was the sole arbiter of Soviet art, which it deemed should be collective in production, public in manifestation and Communist in ideology.

Socialist Realism, with its unrelenting view of a perfect world, an idyll out of reach, became the only approved style in the Soviet Union.
List of works (clockwise in order of hang)

Arkady Shaiket
Physical Training (Morning Gymnastics)
1927
Gelatin silver print
Alex Lachmann Collection, London

Boris Ignatovich
Dinamo Stadium, Moscow
1932
Gelatin silver print
Alex Lachmann Collection, London
Alexander Samokhvalov

Sportswoman with a Shot-put
1933

Oil on canvas
State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow

This young woman is a physically perfected type, a figurehead for the new regime. Samokhvalov’s broad handling of paint and clear colour reinforce the female athlete’s air of confidence.

He was interested in Constructivism but turned to figurative paintings of the new Soviet lifestyle, including athletics and sports parades.
Alexander Deineka
Race
1932
Oil on canvas
The Association of Historical and Regional Art, Tula

Yury Pimenov
Football
1926
Oil on canvas
The Astrakhan State Art Gallery

Pimenov, like Samokhvalov and Deineka, made paintings that the masses could understand, often focusing on heroic images of the human figure. Footballers were admired for their strength and team spirit, ideals promoted by the Soviet state.
Alexander Samokhvalov
Girl in a Football Jersey
1932
Tempera on canvas
State Russian Museum, St Petersburg

Alexander Deineka
Football
1924
Oil on canvas
Collection of Vladimir Tsarenkov

Boris Ignatovich
May Day, Red Square, Moscow
1927
Gelatin silver print
Alex Lachmann Collection, London
Alexander Rodchenko
Pioneer with Trumpet
1930
Gelatin silver print
Alex Lachmann Collection, London

With no memory of life in Imperial Russia, the young Communists of the Pioneer movement were valued as the first pure generation of the Soviet Union. They contributed to the new society by doing helpful deeds and often participated in parades, led by a bugler.

Rodchenko’s close-up, low viewpoint dramatically frames this Pioneer against the sky – he appears as a heroic, anonymous figure.
Boris Ignatovich
Demonstration
1927
Gelatin silver print
Alex Lachmann Collection, London

Boris Ignatovich
Dinamo Factory Brass Band
1926
Gelatin silver print
Alex Lachmann Collection, London

Georgy Petrusov
Caricature of Alexander Rodchenko
c. 1933–1934
Gelatin silver print
Alex Lachmann Collection, London
Varvara Stepanova
Result of the Five-year Plan
1932
Photomontage
Alex Lachmann Collection, London

Alexander Deineka
Who Is Winning?
1932
Gouache and collage on paper
Alex Lachmann Collection, London

This collage, a study for a painting, sums up the period from the 1917 Revolution to 1932, and symbolises Stalin’s ambitious plans for industry and growth.

The figures walking confidently towards the viewer are the planners, engineers and architects who would build Stalin’s utopia.
The great new city of housing blocks and railways is behind them, but Deineka has also added retrospective themes such as the 1917 storming of the Winter Palace and the Civil War.

Moisey Nappelbaum
Joseph Stalin
c. 1934
Gelatin silver print
Alex Lachmann Collection, London

Boris Iofan
Palace of the Soviets, Perspective
1935
Ink on paper
Alex Lachmann Collection, London
Display case 1

Boris Iofan

Palace of the Soviets
1932

Wood

Alex Lachmann Collection, London

The Palace of the Soviets, the ultimate Soviet monument, was intended to be the tallest building in the world, surmounted by a statue of Lenin.

It was to be located on the site of the demolished Cathedral of Christ the Saviour in Moscow. Iofan’s winning Neoclassical design was later revised into a skyscraper.

Building began in 1937 but was brought to a halt by the German invasion in 1941. The foundations became a giant swimming pool and the cathedral was rebuilt in the 1990s.
Display case 2

Unknown

XIV Years of the Red Army
1932
Lacquer, tempera and gold paint on papier mâché
Alex Lachmann Collection, London

Display case 3

Nizhny Novgorod

Commemoration of the Flight of a Russian Dirigible from Moscow to New York Piloted by Three Soviet Airmen
C. 1932
Lacquer, tempera and gold paint on papier mâché
Alex Lachmann Collection, London

The Palace of the Soviets is shown on one side of this urn and on the other the Empire State Building in New York.
Films:

Unknown
Moscow Sports Parade
Compilation distributed by Unity Films,
Great Britain, 1939
Excerpt: 3 minutes 14 seconds

Elaborately choreographed displays in Red Square, Moscow, became an important feature of Soviet culture in the 1930s. Stalin was always highly visible, either as an image or in person.

This uncredited footage of a sports parade was distributed in Britain by the workers’ theatre group Unity, which was known for its socialist propaganda productions.
Vladislav Mikosha

Destruction of the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour, Moscow
5 December 1931

Excerpt: 1 minute 33 seconds

The ornate Cathedral of Christ the Saviour, consecrated in 1883 as a memorial to the defeat of Napoleon in 1812, was demolished with explosives on 5 December 1931, after its gold domes and contents had been removed.

Mikosha, the young cameraman who made this film of the demolition, later became a celebrated war photographer.
Room of Memory

“No generation had a fate like that in history”
–Anna Akhmatova

Stalin ruled by terror and millions of Russians died during his brutal reign.

The photographs shown here document some of those who were persecuted during his so-called purges. Taken after the victims were arrested, the images are testimony to the horror that emerged under the Soviet regime and lasted until Stalin’s death in 1953.

To crush any so-called anti-Soviet elements in society, he expanded the powers of the secret police, encouraged citizens to spy on one another and sent many innocent people to the Gulag – forced-labour prison camps, mostly in Siberia.

There, many were shot, often with no trial and on fabricated charges.
Starting in the late 1920s and continuing throughout the 1930s, there were massive waves of arrests. The victims included engineers, scholars, economists, politicians, writers, composers and artists, as well as thousands of ordinary citizens.

Vsevolod Meyerhold, the great theatre director, was tortured and shot. The critic and curator Nikolai Punin, who supported radical art after 1917, was exiled to the frozen far north of the country, where he died.

The most extreme period of persecution, between 1936 and 1938, is known as the Great Purge.
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Revolution
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Wohl Central Hall

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Vladimir Tatlin – ‘Letatlin’: introduction to this gallery
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Vladimir Tatlin: ‘Letatlin’

This is a modern re-creation of one of Vladimir Tatlin’s gliders, a series that he worked on between 1929 and 1932. He called them ‘Letatlin’, joining his own name with the Russian word letat, “to fly”.

Tatlin’s gliders were prototype flying machines for a new era, when man might soar like a bird on currents of air. His research into natural structures, especially the skeletons of birds and insects, led him to make winged constructions big enough for a pilot out of steamed and bent ash wood.

These beautifully crafted gliders, which resemble the bird studies of Leonardo da Vinci, never flew successfully. They were displayed in the Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts, Moscow, in 1932.

An artist and architect, Tatlin was a pioneer of the Constructivist movement.
'Letatlin’ conformed to the Constructivists’ belief that art should be practical and serve people’s needs, in this case a machine for flying or, as Tatlin called it, “a worker’s flying bicycle”.

This series of visionary gliders also relates back to his best-known work, the Utopian ‘Monument to the Third International’ (1919–1920), known as “Tatlin’s Tower”. This unrealised design for the Communist International headquarters in Moscow synthesised art and technology.

But Tatlin was a mystic, too, and his flying sculptures can be seen as a metaphor for aspiration and setting the imagination free.
List of works

Vladimir Tatlin

Letatlin
1932

Reconstruction by Henry Milner, 2013
Green ash, cork, leather, steel, calico, cotton, webbing, plywood and twine

Courtesy GRAD: Gallery for Russian Arts and Design, London

Unknown

Presentation of Vladimir Tatlin’s ‘Letatlin’ in Moscow
1933

Photograph facsimile
State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow
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Your feedback, please

As we are committed to access for all, we would like your feedback on our large-print provision. Feedback forms are available from the Information Desk on the ground floor.

We also offer one-to-one audio descriptive tours of the exhibitions with trained volunteer audio describers.

Wheelchair users can also benefit from our volunteers, who can assist with taking you around the galleries so you can enjoy our exhibitions at your leisure. With prior notice we can arrange these at a time that fits in with your schedule. Contact me for further information.

Thank you.

Molly Bretton, Access Manager