

"la Caixa" Social Outreach Programmes discovers at CaixaForum Madrid the art and architecture from the 1920s and 30s

Building the Revolution.

Soviet Art and Architecture 1915-1935

The Soviet State that emerged from the 1917 Russian Revolution fostered a new visual language aimed at building a new society based on the socialist ideal. The decade and a half that followed the Revolution was a period of intense activity and innovation in the field of the arts, particularly amongst architects, marked by the use of pure geometric forms. The new State required new types of building, from commune houses, clubs and sports facilities for the victorious proletariat, factories and power stations in order to bring ambitious plans for industrialisation to fruition, and operations centres from which to implement State policy and to broadcast propaganda, as well as such outstanding monuments as Lenin's Mausoleum. *Building the Revolution. Soviet Art and Architecture 1915-1935* illustrates one of the most exceptional periods in the history of architecture and the visual arts, one that is reflected in the engagement of such constructivist artists as Lyubov Popova and Alexander Rodchenko and Russian architects like Konstantin Melnikov, Moisei Ginzburg and Alexander Vesnin, as well as the European architects Le Corbusier and Mendelsohn. The exhibition features some 230 works, including models, artworks (paintings and drawings) and photographs, featuring both vintage prints from the 1920s and 30s and contemporary images by the British photographer Richard Pare. *Building the Revolution. Soviet Art and Architecture 1915-1935*, is organised by the Royal Academy of Arts of London in cooperation with "la Caixa" Social Outreach Programmes and the SMCA-Costakis Collection of Thessaloniki. The exhibition forms part of the Official Programme of PhotoEspaña 2011 and of the 2011 Dual Year Programme from Spain to Russia and from Russia to Spain.

The exhibition *Building the Revolution. Soviet Art and Architecture, 1915-1935* will be open to the public at CaixaForum Madrid (Paseo del Prado, 36) from 25 May to 18 September 2011. It will later travel to the Royal Academy of Arts, London (October 2011 – January 2012).

Madrid, 24 May 2011.- Lluís Reverter, Secretary General of Fundació "la Caixa", will this evening officially open the exhibition *Building the Revolution. Soviet Art and Architecture 1915-1935*, accompanied by: MaryAnne Stevens (Royal Academy of Arts of London); Maria Tsantsanoglou (Director of the State Museum of Contemporary Art (SMCA)); and the photographer Richard Pare, advisor to the curators.

In its cultural programmes, "la Caixa" Social Outreach Programmes focuses particularly on the most contemporary art, that from the 20th and 21st centuries. The exhibition *Building the Revolution. Soviet Art and Architecture, 1915-1935* explores a period that is decisive for any understanding our culture today, and it does so through the **most complete review ever made of Russian avant-garde art and architecture**. The initiative also comprises a valuable addition to a programme of architecture exhibitions organised by "la Caixa" that has already included shows devoted to Palladio, Mies van der Rohe and Richard Rogers.

The architecture of the Soviet Revolution is based on ideas of functionality, economy and efficiency fused with creativity and formal daring. As such, Soviet architecture became a **model for architects of the modern movement and can still provide a reference for today's designers**, faced as they are by the challenge of making maximum use of the available resources to the benefit of the community.

The exhibition places particular emphasis on the way in which fine artists and architects joined together under the Bolshevik cause in a period marked by radical departures in art. However, after the institutionalisation of so-called Socialist Realism as the official style imposed by the new Stalinist regime, these artists were considered "undesirables" and their works were sent to the provinces. In this context, the **exhibition also reflects on what remains from all that, nearly a century later**.

The exhibition, then, focuses on one of the most exceptional periods in the history of architecture, from the October Revolution to the founding of the USSR. Organised by the Royal Academy of Arts of London in cooperation with Fundació "la Caixa" and the SMCA-Costakis Collection of Thessaloniki, *Building the Revolution. Soviet Art and Architecture 1915-1935* is based on an exhibition produced at SMCA Thessaloniki. Its curators are: MaryAnne Stevens, Royal Academy of Arts (London), and Maria Tsantsanoglou, State Museum of Contemporary Art (Thessaloniki), in cooperation with Richard Pare.

Through this exhibition, moreover, "la Caixa" Social Outreach Programmes lends its support to 2011 Dual Year from Spain to Russia and from Russia to Spain, a government initiative that will embrace more than 800 events in the

fields of culture, economics, science and education in the two countries over the course of the year.

A collective project by artists engaged in different disciplines

Over the period from 1915 to 1935, a collective project sprang up, bringing together **visual artists from the constructivist movement** (Lyubov Popova, Alexander Rodchenko, Vladimir Tatlin, Kazimir Malevich, El Lissitzky and Gustav Klutis) **and architects to address the task of creating a new society based on socialist ideas**. The result were radical works by the architects Konstantin Melnikov, Moisei Ginzburg, Ilya Golosov and Leonid and Alexander Vesnin, amongst others, as well as interventions by Le Corbusier and Erich Mendelsohn, French and German architects respectively.

The works featured in *Building the Revolution. Soviet Art and Architecture, 1915-1935* include a collection of **photographs from the 1920s and 30s** from the Schusev State Museum of Architecture in Moscow. This museum conserves the archives from the old Soviet Academy of Architecture, which include this series of photographs of outstanding historic and artistic value.

Secondly, the exhibition comprises **drawings, models and paintings by artists and architects** from the Costakis Collection in the State Museum of Contemporary Art (SMCA), Thessaloniki. These works were recovered at a time when avant-garde architecture was shunned in the USSR. Now, saved from destruction, they constitute unique testimony to those times.

The exhibition is completed by **three more large-scale models**. Two, from the University of East Anglia's abstract and constructivist architecture and design collection, illustrate two of Konstantin Melnikov's most important works: the Rusakov workers' club and the Melnikov House, both in Moscow. The third model is of the so-called Tatlin Tower, the Monument to the Third International, in a reconstruction made in 2001 and conserved at the Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe in Hamburg.

Finally, *Building the Revolution. Soviet Art and Architecture, 1915-1935* includes a series of **images by the British photographer Richard Pare**. From 1992 to 2010, Pare exhaustively documented the most outstanding buildings from the first revolutionary period as he found them in when he visited these sites after the fall of the Berlin Wall. Pare's contribution shows the importance of these works whilst also appealing for their restoration.

The result of all this is an absolutely extraordinary exhibition. The archive images, the artworks and Pare's contemporary photographs establish a dialogue that brings to life the spirit of understanding amongst artists from

different disciplines which characterised the early years of Soviet art.

A new architecture for a new State

The decade and a half that followed the Revolution was a period marked by intense activity and innovation in the field of the arts and, particularly, amongst architects, who sought a radical new language with which to build Soviet socialism.

The new State required new types of buildings, from commune houses, clubs and sports facilities for the victorious proletariat to factories and power stations to bring ambitious industrialisation plans to fruition and operations centres from which to implement State policy and broadcast propaganda.

From 1922 on, architects responded to these demands with an exceptional explosion of creativity. Many were members of radical organisations, which were also frequented by avant-garde writers and theorists, whilst leading foreign figures such as Le Corbusier and Erich Mendelsohn also joined the cause. All were united in their determination to **establish an architectural style that was no longer subject to the imperial and bourgeois dictates of the past.**

In line with the European Modern Movement, buildings tended to feature **pure geometric forms** supported by unadorned piles or pillars, with continuous horizontal windows and flat roofs. Moreover, architects adhered to the principle by which the external form and the interior distribution should directly reflect the building's function.

The experimental nature of this architecture not only posed a challenge to the construction industry but also, after 1932, began to question the Soviet regime's aesthetic programme. The shortage of building materials and advanced technology compromised the quality of finishes, whilst the radical stance taken by the avant-garde met intense criticism after the rise of Social Realism and the widespread cultural repression imposed from 1929 by Lenin's successor, Joseph Stalin.

The exhibition, organised by type of building, illustrates the heroic years of Soviet architecture through vintage photographs of each project, taken during construction or soon after completion. These images are juxtaposed with others taken by the architectural photographer Richard Pare over the last fifteen years, and which comprise an eloquent report on the degradation that many of these works have suffered.

The photographic series establish a dialogue with the works by leading Russian

avant-garde artists over the period from 1915 to 1930. Exponents of constructivism and suprematism, these artists developed a new visual language based on purely geometric forms, representation in space on a flat surface and the potential connection with design and architecture.

EXHIBITION SECTIONS

Government and communications

After the end of the Civil War in 1920, it was clear that the Communist Party would begin to exercise strict control over government and communications. The projects designed to help fulfil this goal included the Gosprom building, a huge government complex in Kharkov, the new Ukrainian capital. The Tsentosoyuz Building in Moscow, by Le Corbusier, a modern architect from Paris who won the competition for its design, housed the headquarters of the Central Union of Consumer Cooperatives, an organisation that employed around two thousand workers and which was rapidly gaining power in the trade, banking and food production sectors.



The two state newspapers, *Pravda* and *Izvestia*, established their offices in two new constructivist buildings that combined administrative offices with print workshops, an arrangement that was also adopted for the Palace of the Press in Baku, oil capital of Azerbaijan. Whilst both *Izvestia* and *Pravda* trumpeted the policies and achievements of the Communist Party within the country, the Shabolovka radio tower, designed by Vladimir Shukhov, broadcast the Revolution's message to the world. Built by the newly-created Komintern in 1922, the tower embodied Vladimir Tatlin's 1919 proposal for a Monument to the Third International.

Industry

World War One, the Revolution and the Civil War had left the Soviet economy in tatters. In the 1920s, the State took over all new industrial plants, and in 1927 Joseph Stalin introduced the first Five-Year Plan, which centred on farm collectivisation and the expansion of heavy industry and electrification.

In 1925, Erich Mendelsohn was invited to submit a project for a textile factory in Saint Petersburg. The site was to include production workshops, administrative offices and a power station. Particularly outstanding amongst other infrastructure projects were the new MoGES power plant in Moscow, the

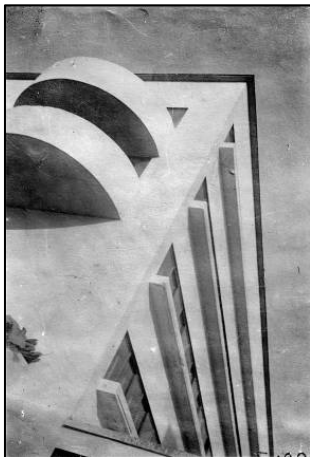
enormous DneproGES dam and hydro power plant in the Ukraine and the water tower in Uralmash, a new industrial suburb of Ekaterinburg.



Farm collectivisation and the push for industrialisation generated an exodus from the fields to the city. A series of initiatives were launched in order to free women from housework and to enable them to join the workforce, with the construction of community complexes such as a bread factory in Moscow and the Narvskaya industrial kitchen, which served meals to the residents of Saint Petersburg. In response to the rapid expansion of motor transport, Konstantin Melnikov designed innovative garages, whilst interest in scientific research as a way of speeding up the industrialisation process led to the establishment of the Central Aerodynamics and Hydrodynamics Institute in Moscow.

Housing

Increasing numbers of urban workers required the construction of new housing in major cities all over the USSR. Moreover, keen to promote the new socialist society, the State sponsored a series of innovative solutions for community life. Community facilities were built near such vast residential complexes as the Traktormaya Ulitsa site in Saint Petersburg.



In the students' commune at the Textile Institute of Moscow, common facilities were provided for a full range of activities, except sleeping, whilst Moisei Ginzburg's collective housing complex in Ekaterinburg combined a community residence for students with family apartment blocks.

This combination, which was often complemented by the provision of crèches, canteens, clubs and libraries, was frequently employed in residential complexes designed for the members of cooperatives or the functionaries at a commissariat. Outstanding examples of this model include the housing cooperative for doctors in Kiev, the residential complex for Cheka (later known by its initials, KGB) officers in Ekaterinburg and Ginzburg's Narkomfin, built for workers at the Commissariat for Finance.

The imposing façade of the Lensoviet House, built for elite administrative officials in Saint Petersburg, underlined the status of its residents, whilst the VTsIK residential complex for top Communist Party functionaries dominated a stretch of the River Moskva. An exception to the general rule was the innovative

house designed by Konstantin Melnikov exclusively for his own family.

Education, health and leisure

In its drive to eradicate illiteracy and spread the socialist ideals, the Bolshevik government built workers' clubs and new academic institutions such as the Tkachey Ulitsa school in Saint Petersburg. Direct descendants of the social centres built in European cities up to 1914, workers' clubs became centres for collective life.

Commissioned by local authorities in the case of the Zuev Workers' Club, by industrial groups and unions, such as the Rusakov Workers' Club or by the residents of housing complexes, the objective of these workers' clubs was to transform the attitudes of the people through educational, sporting and cultural activities, as well to promote Soviet Socialism.

Planning leisure time was an important priority for the Soviet State, as such time offered workers a break from their hard working conditions and the pressure of mass communal housing. The Dynamo sports clubs, such as that in Kiev, were set up to promote a healthy, productive workforce, as well as to foster cooperation. Sanatoria and spa centres for both the proletariat and the elite, such as the Voroshilov Sanatorium for members of the Red Army, became holiday resorts where stays were offered as rewards for exceptional achievement.

Lenin's Mausoleum, Moscow, 1924–1930

Lenin died on 24 January 1924. Alexey Shchusev, an eclectic, opportunist architect, produced three projects in quick succession for a mausoleum in Red Square, where the revolutionary leader had given his most rousing and important speeches. The first version, hurriedly assembled, consisted of three wooden boxes. The central box contained Lenin's funeral chamber, whilst those at the sides served as entrance and exit pavilions. This structure was replaced in August 1924 by a more elaborate design in wood, using classical motifs, possibly inspired by the Tomb of Mausolus in Halicarnassus.

As the cult of Lenin spread, it was decided in 1929 to create a permanent structure. Covered in bright, dark red granite, marble, porphyry and labradorite, the mausoleum is formed by interlinking geometric forms. Lenin's embalmed body lies in state within. In 1953, it was joined by the body of Joseph Stalin, which was removed in 1961 to make way for that of Nikita Khrushchev. The combination of a mausoleum



for the founding father of the Soviet State with a tribune from which speeches

are made invested the building with symbolic significance: it proclaimed that the Leninist doctrine was the basis of Russian socialism, which should be perpetuated by later leaders.

A revolution in art: works from the Costakis Collection



The drawings, paintings and sculptures from the Costakis Collection at the State Museum of Contemporary Art (SMCA), Thessaloniki, are from the period between 1915 and 1932, particularly the 1920s. Russian avant-garde artists and movements from the first three decades of the 20th century, one of the most radical and fascinating periods in art history, are represented in this collection.

As this exhibition illustrates the relations between painting and architecture seen through the prism of the new visual aesthetic that was placed at the service of post-revolutionary Soviet society as a way of understanding the history and reception of Russian constructivist architecture, some of the artworks exhibited here are purely architectural. Nonetheless, many also explore the frontiers between painting and architecture. With an emphasis on the constructivist movement, these drawings reveal their artists' desire to contribute new ideas and solutions to engineering and architectural theory and practice and to experiment with new materials, forms and volumes in order to create an aesthetic that was at once radical and stimulating and practical, for the new Soviet State.

Many artists eschewed traditional painterly themes and techniques, focusing rather on the study of science, mechanics, physics and geometry. Their aim was, through their work, to suggest practical ideas that could be embodied in plausible proposals in the fields of design, graphic art and, finally, architecture. In this way, then, art was placed at the service of a broad-ranging revolutionary programme with a social bent, and which extended even to assembly line production.

Building the Revolution. Soviet Art and Architecture, 1915- 1935

25 May – 18 September 2011

CaixaForum Madrid

Paseo del Prado, 36

28014 Madrid

Times:

Daily, from 10 am to 8 pm

Admission free to exhibitions

INAUGURAL LECTURE

Tuesday, May 24, at 6.30 pm

By MaryAnne Stevens, exhibition curator and Director of Academic Affairs,
Royal Academy of Arts, London

Information Service

Fundació "la Caixa"

Tel. 902 22 30 40

Daily, from 9 am to 8 pm

www.lacaixa.es/obrasocial



Through this exhibition, "la Caixa" Social Outreach Programmes supports 2011 Dual Year, Spain-Russia and PhotoEspaña 2011.

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