

# SHOWCASING ART HISTORY SEASON XI 2016-2017

Spring term 2017

## REVOLUTION IN RUSSIAN ART



A century on, the Russian Revolution of 1917 remains a major event in modern consciousness. 1917 also witnessed radical artistic developments that seemed to echo the political upheavals of the time. Unfortunately, this flourishing of the Russian avant-garde was all too brief. Marking the centenary of these momentous creative and political events, the spring term will offer an introduction to this turbulent era in Russian history which is so vividly captured in the diversity of the art generated between 1917, the year of the October Revolution, and 1932 when Stalin began his suppression of the Avant-Garde.

This period witnessed the culmination of an artistic revolution that had begun earlier in the 1910s, and which had given Russia – and the world - such artists as Marc Chagall, Wassily Kandinsky, Kazimir Malevich, Mikhail Larionov, and Natalia Goncharova, and had given rise to movements like Cubo-Futurism, Suprematism, and Constructivism. For fifteen years after the Bolshevik Revolution – a brief, heady period – numerous artistic trends from realism to abstraction co-existed in the Soviet Union, while all artists faced the challenge of creating a new art for a new form of society, and determining the precise nature of proletarian art.

On 23rd April 1932, a Party decree was passed that fundamentally changed Soviet cultural life and re-structured literary and artistic organizations. Two years later, avant-garde works were no longer on show in any Soviet museum. Artists were forced to produce work that supported Stalinism, or were unable to work at all, emigrated, or were sent to the gulag.

This course of lectures is inspired by the exhibition due to open at the Royal Academy in London in February 2017. The show will contrast the visions of old Russia with Soviet life and culture of the 1920s: Malevich the pioneer of geometric abstraction will confront the extraordinary figurative painter Kuzma Petrov-Vodkin. The display will demonstrate the extraordinary variety of creative endeavours produced during the period, concluding with the grandiose projects of the early 1930s - the world's largest aeroplane, the gigantic and never-built Palace of the Soviets, the Dneiper hydro-electric dam, the massive military processions and sports parades.

Provisional timetable:

Tuesday, 10th January	Creating the Soviet Myth - Introduction to the course - Christina Lodder and Natalia Murray
Tuesday, 17th January	A Brave New World – Natalia Murray
Tuesday, 24th January	Man and Machine – Christina Lodder
Tuesday, 31st January	Kazimir Malevich at the 1932 Exhibition– John Milner
Tuesday, 7th February	The Fate of the Peasantry – Christina Lodder
Tuesday, 14th February	Eternal Russia – Natalia Murray
Tuesday, 21st February	Heroes of the Past living in the Future – Natalia Murray
Tuesday, 28th February	New Buildings for the New Society – Christina Lodder
Tuesday, 7th March	Kuzma Petrov-Vodkin – Natalia Murray
Tuesday, 14th March	Stalin's Utopia – Christina Lodder

**Preliminary Reading:**

Clark, Katerina, *Petersburg, Crucible of Cultural Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996)

Kovtun, Evgeny, *Russian Avant-Garde* (Grange Books, 2007)

Lodder, Cristina, *Russian Constructivism* (New Haven, London, 1983)

Rosenthal, Berenice, *New Myth, New World, From Nietzsche To Stalinism* (PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002)

Milner, John, *Kazimir Malevich and the Art of Geometry* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996)

Murray, Natalia, *The Unknown Hero of the Russian Avant-Garde. The Life and Times of Nikolay Punin (1888-1953)* (Brill Academic Publishers, 2012)

Stites, Richard, *Revolutionary Dreams: Utopian Vision and Experimental Life in the Russian Revolution* (Oxford and London: Oxford University Press, 1989)

Williams, Robert C., *Artists in Revolution. Portraits of the Russian Avant-garde, 1905-1925* (London, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1977)

Zhadova, L. *Kazimir Malevich: Suprematism and the Revolution in Russian Art. 1910-1930* (London, 1982)

## **Lecturers' biographies:**

### **Professor Christina Lodder**

Christina Lodder is an Honorary Professor of the History and Philosophy of Art at the University of Kent, President of the Malevich Society, and co-editor of Brill's Russian History and Culture series. She has written extensively on Russian art of the early twentieth century, including *Russian Constructivism* (1983); *Constructing Modernity: The Art and Career of Naum Gabo* (co-author with Martin Hammer, 2000); *Gabo on Gabo* (co-editor with Martin Hammer, 2000); *Constructive Strands in Russian Art* (2005); *Rethinking Malevich* (co-editor with Charlotte Douglas, 2007); *Utopian Reality: Reconstructing Culture in Revolutionary Russia and Beyond* (co-editor with Maria Kokkori and Maria Mileeva, 2013); and a translation and introduction to Aleksei Gan's *Constructivism* (2013).

### **Dr Natalia Murray**

Before being awarded PhD at the Courtauld Institute of Art, Natalia read History of Art at the Academy of Fine Arts in St. Petersburg and completed the PhD course at the Hermitage Museum.

At present she is working as head of education and public programmes at GRAD (Gallery for Russian Art and Design) and curating exhibitions of Russian Art in England. Her recent exhibitions include 'Jack of Diamonds and the Russian Avant-Garde', The Courtauld Gallery, 18 September 2014 – 18 January 2015 and 'Elena Polenova and Russian Arts and Crafts', Watts Gallery, 18 November 2014 - 8 February 2015.

She is currently curating a major exhibition 'Revolution. Russian Art. 1917-1932' which will take place at the Royal Academy of Arts in February - April 2017 and editing her next book on post-revolutionary festivals in Petrograd. Natalia is also trustee of the Russian Avant-Garde Research Project.