



Kazimir Malevich, Female Portrait. 1910 – 1911

UTOPIA AND AVANT-GARDE

Russian art from the Costakis Collection

MOMus – Museum of Modern Art, Thessaloniki

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GEORGE COSTAKIS

Born in Moscow in 1913, George Costakis was a passionate collector who, despite having no artistic training or knowledge of modern art, developed a keen aesthetic sense. Over three decades, he assembled a remarkable collection of the Russian Avant-garde, rescuing numerous pieces from oblivion and destruction.

During the 1960s and 1970s, his Moscow apartment became a haven for banned avant-garde art, attracting young painters, diplomats, artists, writers and musicians. In 1977, Costakis moved to Greece, leaving part of his collection to the Tretyakov Gallery in Moscow. He died in Athens in 1990.

The other part of his collection, consisting of 1,277 artworks, was acquired by the Greek State in 2000 and became the main collection of the Museum of Modern Art (MOMus) in Thessaloniki. In addition, the collector's family donated his archive, with important documents from the Russian Avant-garde, to the museum.



Costakis by Igor Palmin 1970



Liubov Popova. *Construction of Spatial Force*, 1921.
Oil and sawdust on veneered wood. 112,5 x 112,3

THE COSTAKIS COLLECTION

The Costakis Collection arrives at the Colección del Museo Ruso thanks to the sponsorship of Fundación Unicaja. Housed in the Museum of Modern Art in Thessaloniki, the collection is a testament to George Costakis's unwavering dedication and visionary spirit.

The Russian Avant-garde was not just an artistic movement. It was a profound cultural and social experiment. Artists such as Kazimir Malevich and Liubov Popova imagined a future in which art transcended traditional boundaries and influenced architecture and design. They believed that art could drive social progress and reshape the world.

The exhibition *Utopia and Avant-Garde. Russian Art in the Costakis Collection* reveals the development of the 20th-century artistic movements with works by artists like Malevich, Popova, Larionov, Kliun, Klucis and Filonov. For the first time in Spain, 450 works of art and a hundred archival objects from the Costakis Collection are on display.

Curated by MOMus Director Maria Tsantsanoglou, *Utopia and Avant-garde. Russian Art in the Costakis Collection* provides insight into the development of Russian art in the 20th century, from Symbolism and Post-Impressionism to Suprematism and Constructivism.



Ivan Kliun, *Family*, 1911. Oil on cardboard. 45 x 36

New Impressionism and Symbolism. Towards the End of the Old World.

Symbolism and post-impressionist tendencies dominated the European art scene at the beginning of the 20th century. Both had a great influence on the artists who transformed the art scene in the Russian Empire.



Liubov Popova, *Travelling woman*, 1915. Oil on canvas. 158,5 x 123

Cubofuturism. A Slap in the Face of Public Taste!

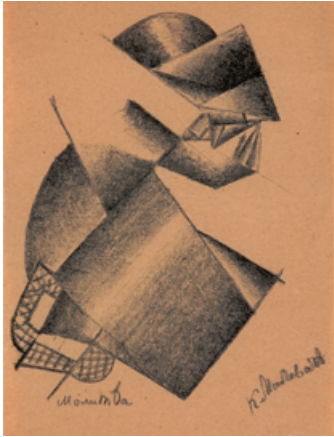
Artists like Popova or Rozanova adopted elements of French Cubism, while assimilating the keen sense of movement and the ability to describe successive moments simultaneously, typical of the Italian futurists. This is how Russian Cubofuturism emerged.



Vladimir Mayakovsky, *Patriotic poster against the Turks*, 1914. Color lithograph. 38,4 x 55,8

Modern Lubki. Caricaturing World War I.

Lubki is the name given to popular prints on religious themes or for educational purposes that appeared in Russia in the 16th century. Avant-garde artists reinvented them.



Kazimir Malévich, *Prayer*, 1914.
Lithography. 17,1x11,2

Searching for a New Language. Reciting Futurism. The Avant-garde artists did not confine themselves to one field but extended their activity and experimentation into all the arts.



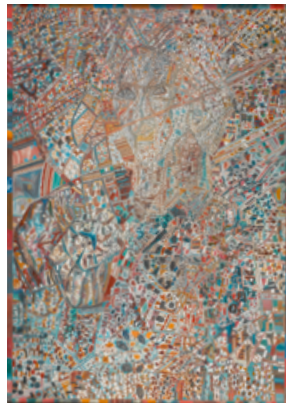
Ilya Chashnik, *Suprematist cross*, 1923.
Oil on canvas. 133,4 x 132,2

Suprematism. In Search of the Invisible. Kazimir Malevich is one of the most versatile and radical artists of the avant-garde. His career took him from the Impressionism and Symbolism of the early 20th century to Cubofuturism and the influence of the “supralogical language” of the Russian futurists.



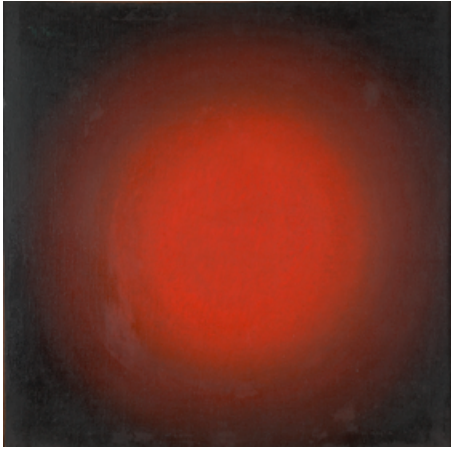
Ksenia Ender. *Untitled*, 1920s.
Watercolor and gouache on paper. 15,4 x 19,1

The School of Organic Culture. A New Approach to Nature. The term “organic culture” was coined by the painter and musician Mikhail Matiushin and is based on the theory that the world is a rigorously structured system governed by laws, with its own biological rhythm to which inorganic components also respond.



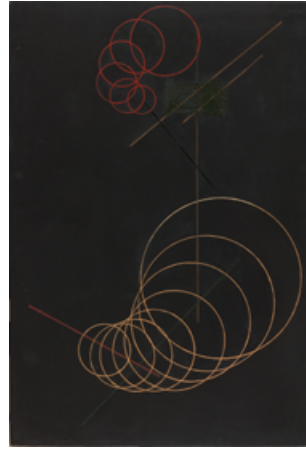
Pável Filonov, *Head*, 1925-1926.
Oil, watercolor and gouache on cardboard. 86,7 x 60,7

Pavel Filonov and the Students. Analytic Art. The Unfinished Painting. Filonov was an independent figure in the avant-garde world. Through his theoretical approach to art he developed his own “analytical” school, based on the idea that the work of art is captured on the canvas following a labyrinthine line of tiny images.



Ivan Kliun, *Red light*. Spherical construction, 1923.
Oil on canvas. 68,3 x 67,7

Cosmism. Colonies in Space. Visits to the laboratory of space rocket engineer Konstantin Tsiolkovski left an indelible impression on Ivan Kudriashev, inspiring him to develop the notion of “space painting” or “cosmism.”



Aleksandr Rodchenko, *Linearism*, 1920.
Oil on canvas. 102,5 x 69,7

Constructivism and Productive Art. Enough with Art! Constructivism is one of the most important trends and the last great movement of the Russian Avant-garde. Constructivism was largely a political art, seeking to create artworks with functional value.



Solomon Nikritin, *Study for "Farewell to the dead"*, 1926
Pencil and ink on paper. 16,2 x 21,8

Projectionism. Cinematic Drawings.

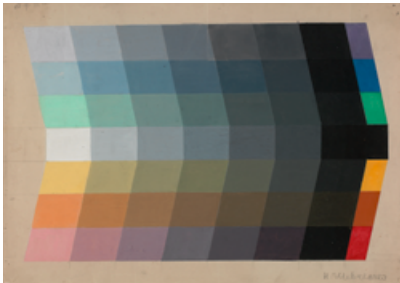
The projectionists, represented mainly by Solomon Nikritin and Sergei Luchishkin, emerged in Moscow in 1921. Projectionism implied the creation of works of art which had to be made in a field and went beyond canvas or paper, such as theater and cinema.



Kliment Redko. *LuminismSynthetic light development*, 1923. Oil on canvas. 62,4 x 47

Electro-organism. Artificial Light.

Electro-organism aim to represent the organization of life through the dominant source that corresponds to the light-life relationship. According to Kliment Redko, the success of the visual arts depends on the way creators react to the scientific and technological breakthroughs of their time.



Nicolai Schevchenko, *Color study*. Pencil, watercolor and gouache on paper. 49,5 x 34,9

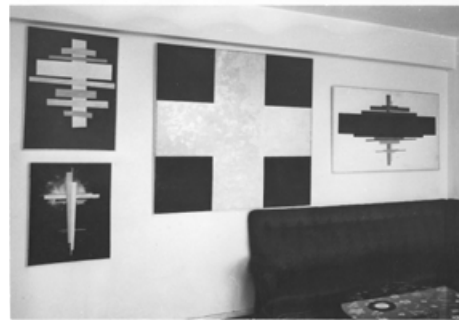
VkhUTEMAS (Higher Artistic-Technical Studios). Revolution and Art Education.

The VkhUTEMAS were established in 1920 and remained open until 1930. These workshops provided skills and techniques to artists who had already completed their first training itinerary. The aim was to create artists with special training in industrial construction and architecture.



Aleksandr Drevin. *Woman with long hair*, 1931. Oil on canvas. 90,4 x 73,8

New representation. Beginning in the mid-1920s, the official stance on the avant-garde movements hardened. As early as 1934, the Stalinist State demanded total submission to the dogma of socialist realism, condemned the avant-garde, persecuted many of the artists under the accusation of “formalists” and prohibited the exhibition of their artworks.



George Costakis's Moscow apartment and the guest books.

In the 1960s and 1970s, George Costakis's apartment in Moscow was a sort of unofficial museum of modern art. The notes that fill the pages of the guest books that the collector kept are truly moving. Among them are annotations and drawings by Marc Chagall, Henri Cartier-Bresson, Andrzej Wajda and Maia Plisetskaja.

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