

КИНЕТИЧЕСКИЕ РИТМЫ

The Dynamic Spirit of Russian Modernism

In the early twentieth century, artistic movements developed with an unknown intensity and velocity. The Futurist manifesto **A Slap in the Face of Public Taste** (1912) called to “throw Pushkin, Tolstoi, Dostoevskii etc., etc., overboard from the ship of modernity,” and deemed moderate writers, including Maksim Gor’kii, Aleksandr Blok, and Aleksei Remizov “insignificant.”

The liberation of the arts from the restraints of the conventional canon was many artists’ major concern. It went hand in hand with artistic innovation. Artists created numerous art “isms”—Neo-primitivism, Cubofuturism, Suprematism, Constructivism, Rayism—in rapid succession, while Futurism was an overarching term used to describe contemporary progressive art

This exhibition brings together works from the Thomas P. Whitney collection, reflecting the dynamic spirit of the artistic milieu of the first three decades of the twentieth century. It exemplifies the many ways of breaking free from the prevalent realistic canon, including Larionov’s early aesthetic explorations before 1910, Baranov-Rossiné’s figurative modernism, and Chashnik’s radical geometrical abstraction. Artists from the postwar generation—such as Oleg Kudriashov—frequently referred to avant-garde experiments, particularly geometrical abstraction

One idea connected many of the artistic experiments despite their visual and conceptual differences: dynamism. While this idea included artistic, social, and technical progress, it took particular visual shape in abstract and nonfigurative artworks. Dynamics referred not only to the depiction of speed and velocity in works of art, but to the presence of a visual tension and a deliberately imbalanced balance, achieved by arranging colors and shapes without introducing a narrative.

Anastasiia Ivanovna (Anna) Akhtyrko
Moscow 1902–1967 Moscow

Samovar, 1919

Brush and brown ink and wash over blue crayon on light paper

Gift of Thomas P. Whitney (Class of 1937)
AC 2001.30



Akhtyrko created this drawing while studying at the First State Free Art Studio (SVOMAS) in Moscow. Her teacher, Nikolai Pavlovich Ul'ianov, practiced a slightly geometricized figurative style characterized by strong contrasts. Akhtyrko appears to adapt this style in her rendering of a samovar.

The artist continued to study at VKhUTEMAS under Aleksandr Rodchenko and Nikolai Favorskii. She was a promising avant-garde artist, yet in the 1940s the Soviet art establishment accused her of Formalism—a judgment made of most artists pursuing even the slightest deviation from positivist realism—and for the rest of her life she designed safety posters for the state.

Vladimir Baranov-Rossiné
Bol'shaia Lepatikha, Tauride Province, Russian Empire (now
Zaporizhia Region, Ukraine) 1888–1942 France

The Peasant Woman and the Cow, ca. 1912
Gouache over pencil on cardboard

Gift of Thomas P. Whitney (Class of 1937)
AC 2001.110



This painting reflects Baranov-Rossiné's fascination with Cubism and Orphism, a style developed by his French friend Robert Delaunay that explores the dynamism of color combinations. These movements were in vogue when the young artist arrived in Paris in 1910. Like many of his compatriots from the Pale of Settlement—an area in the Russian Empire where the Jewish community was assigned to live—he decided to emigrate to the French capital. He showed his works at the Salon d'Automne that same year and very soon became a full-fledged member of the École de Paris. While Baranov-Rossiné always painted the figurative form, he experimented with the interaction of color and light, as well as sound.

Vil'iam Petrovich Brui
Born Leningrad (now St. Petersburg), 1946

Bridge, 1965
Etching on medium heavy paper



Gift of Thomas P. Whitney (Class of 1937)
AC 2001.141

Brui associated with the experimental graphic section of the Union of Artists, which attracted independent artists. Older colleagues introduced him to the work of the Russian avant-garde, and helped hone his skills as a printmaker. In 1959, the ambitious young artist organized his first exhibition, which he held in his apartment. Later, in his mid-twenties, Brui left the Soviet Union, eventually settling in France.

With its interplay of light and dark, *Bridge* is typical of Brui's prints of the 1960s. The black curved lines evoke a complex architectural construction, while the spaces are filled with a multitude of patterns. Perhaps the dynamic distortions relate to the artist's interest at the time in then-popular theories of the paradox of the shrinking or expanding universe.

Il'ia Grigor'evich Chashnik

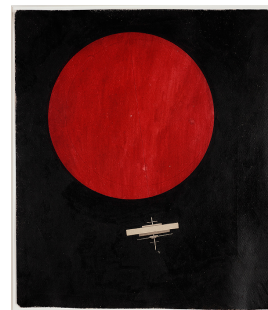
Lucyn, Russian Empire (now Ludza, Latvia) 1902–1929 Leningrad
(now St. Petersburg)

Red Circle and Suprematist Cross, ca. 1925

India ink and watercolor on paper

Gift of Thomas P. Whitney (Class of 1937)

AC 2001.198



The red circle suggests a planet hovering in deep black space, while the small cross-like structure appears to be an approaching spaceship. Throughout the 1920s, many artists worked on actual architectural projects for cosmic floating cities. Chashnik, on the other hand, explored the vision of inhabiting space with the painterly means of geometrical abstraction—the visual language of Suprematism, in other words. Suprematist painting, he said, “advances to the absolute non-objectivity of form,” depicting nothing but independently composed elements and their interrelationship. Purposelessness was the Suprematist ideal. Suprematists accused man of turning everything he could get ahold of into a useful object. The universe, because it was a not-yet functionalized territory, therefore appeared ideal for the exploration of aesthetics and ideas beyond a mundane context.

The red circle and the white cross beneath it form a dynamic composition; while neither of the two shapes is centered, they are well balanced. Nothing is accidental, even the tiny line beneath the vertical axis of the cross adds momentum. Thus the artist invites viewers to behold the painting and let their thoughts float.

Aleksandra Aleksandrovna Ekster
Belostok, Russian Empire (now Poland) 1882–1949 Fontenay-aux-
Roses, near Paris

Stage Set Design for Shakespeare's "Merchant of Venice,"
design 1924 or before, printed in 1930
Pochoir



Gift of Thomas P. Whitney (Class of 1937)
AC 2001.09

Aleksandra Ekster started her career as a theater designer at Aleksandr Tairov's Chamber Theatre in Moscow in 1916. When she relocated to Paris in 1924, she became famous all over Europe as a theater artist. It was her conscious decision to continue in this field, since she was well aware of the greater difficulty she would have trying to find an enthusiastic audience for her painting.

Merchant of Venice was published in 1930 in a portfolio of fifteen designs titled *Maquettes de theatre*, featuring mostly unrealized projects. With their publication, Ekster aimed to showcase the many facets of her theatrical work.

Ekster regarded the stage as a venue waiting to be explored and inexhaustible in its Constructive possibilities. Her designs owe much to Constructivism. Yet they oscillate between architectural structure and abstract composition, which is distinctive of her work.

Vasilii Dmitrovich Ermilov
Kharkov, Ukraine 1894–1968 Kharkov, Ukraine

Memorial-Museum to Picasso, 1967
Wood, celluloid

Gift of Thomas P. Whitney (Class of 1937)
AC 2001.563



According to Russian scholar Aleksandr Parnis, Ermilov executed this model at his request after an idea of the 1920s. The artist was a leading spirit of the post-revolutionary avant-garde in Ukraine, and the shape and colors of the Memorial-Museum clearly reflect his earlier Constructive work. Even in the 1960s Ermilov apparently believed that “Lenin’s epoch was connected to a completely new style of artistic expression.”

Owing to his Communist affiliation, Spanish artist Pablo Picasso was popular with Russian revolutionaries. While his work could not be publicly shown under Stalin—because it did not conform to the positivism of Socialist Realism—it was presented in a solo exhibition in Moscow in 1959. Ermilov learned about Picasso’s art early in his artistic career, and some of his early works resemble Picasso’s.

Naum Gabo
Briansk, Russian Empire 1890–1977 Waterbury, Connecticut

Project of a Tower on “Trubnaia Ploshchad” in Moscow, 1919
Pencil on paper faced paperboard

Gift of Thomas P. Whitney (Class of 1937)
AC 2001.194



After the October Revolution in 1917, the new design of public space was among the priorities of the government. Sculptural decoration of squares, kiosks, tribunes, and towers was planned, where people could read, listen to news, and express their own thoughts publicly. While many of these projects remained on paper, the goal was to erect them throughout the city centers of Moscow and St. Petersburg for the propagation of new social and political ideas. Important avant-garde artists, including Lissitzky, Klutis, and Tatlin, participated in this project.

Gabo's *Project for a Tower* falls in this era. Its main features appear to be a lower platform for speakers and a radio station on the top. The tower's shape reflects the linear and spiraling dynamic that is typical of the artist's work.

Wassily Kandinsky
Moscow 1866–1944 Neuilly-sur-Seine, France

Abstract Composition, 1916
India ink, pencil on sketchbook paper

Gift of Thomas P. Whitney (Class of 1937)
AC 2001.104



“Every work technically forms in the way in which the cosmos formed—by means of catastrophes, which in the end create a symphony out of the chaotic roar of instruments, called spherical music. The creation of a work is the creation of the world.” In his art Kandinsky aimed to render the laws of the cosmos and the human spirit. He saw himself as a mediator who could sense the vibrations of the world’s soul and convey them to the beholders of his art.

Kandinsky’s so-called organic abstraction contrasts with the clear geometrical shapes of Suprematism and even Cubofuturism. It conveys the seemingly unorganized structures of life, which are full of movement. A diagonal tension dominates this composition, yet many small elements distract the eye, evoking associations with nature.

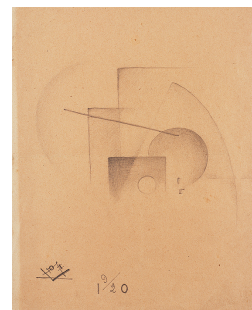
Ivan Vasil'evich Kliun
Moscow 1873–1943 Moscow

Geometrical Design, 1920

Pencil on buff paper

Gift of Thomas P. Whitney (Class of 1937)

AC 2001.171



The irregular geometrical shapes in this drawing reflect Kliun's synthesis of Cubist, Suprematist, and Constructivist approaches. The artist's experiments with Cubist and Purist forms appear to resonate in the complex structure of Geometrical Design. Yet Kliun was most indebted to Kasimir Malevich (1878–1935), with whom he was close friends. Malevich's Suprematism introduced completely non-representational geometrical abstraction to the public in 1915. Around the same time, Kliun discovered Tatlin's abstract spatial constructions. In Geometrical Design he arranged seemingly overlapping quasi-geometrical shapes, evoking the vague impression of three dimensional space and a sense of unstable balance. The monogram at the lower margin adds a playful element to the drawing.

Despite his interest in the Constructive element, Kliun believed in the transformative value of art and did not enter the world of applied design, which many avant-garde artists embraced around 1920.

Ivan Alekseevich Kudriashov
Kaluga, Russia 1896–1972 Moscow

Abstract Design, 1920

Gouache over pencil sketch on tan woodpulp paper



Gift of Thomas P. Whitney (Class of 1937)
AC 2001.249

In 1919/1920 Kudriashov lived in Orenburg, where he participated in establishing the State Free Art School (SVOMAS) and created decorations for local theaters. This design belongs to preparatory sketches for the First Soviet Theater.

The geometrical shapes, arranged in a dynamic composition, and the bright colors reference Kasimir Malevich's Suprematism. Kudriashov studied with Malevich and was a member of his short-lived but influential group UNOVIS (the Champions of the New Art). The actual drawing, however, is probably the artist's own later copy after his original work.

Ivan Alekseevich Kudriashov
Kaluga, Russia 1896–1972 Moscow

Futurist Tram, 1918

Pencil on paper

Gift of Thomas P. Whitney (Class of 1937)
AC 2001.235



Kudriashov's *Futurist Tram* celebrates technical and industrial progress. Everything in the drawing seems to be moving and spinning, as if to render the speed of modern life.

In 1918 Kudriashov was close to finishing his artistic education at the State Free Art Studios (SVOMAS). Like many of his contemporaries in the mid-1910s, the artist was attracted by Futurism, which aimed to capture the dynamism of its time and subjects. Along with its Italian counterpart and international Dadaism, Russian Futurism represented the most radical answer to the senselessness of the First World War and the end of the system that had perpetrated it.

Mikhail Fedorovich Larionov
Tiraspol, Moldova 1881–1964 Fontenay-aux-Roses, near Paris

Landscape (Paysage: Étude), ca. 1909

Oil on canvas laid on fiberboard

Gift of Thomas P. Whitney (Class of 1937)

AC 2001.20



This painting belongs to Larionov's brief Fauve period, in which he worked with intensive colors and energetic brushstrokes. Russian artists became acquainted with this style through an exhibition of modern French painting in Moscow that Larionov helped organize. In *Landscape* he merely indicates the details of the landscape and objects. Dark contours keep the bursts of paint within their designated shapes. Larionov's motifs reveal his interest in Russian everyday life, which he represents here in an agricultural scene.

Landscape includes early indicators of two artistic movements that Larionov elaborated on around 1912. The abstract details and ray-like brushstrokes appear to anticipate the artist's turn toward his nonfigurative style, called Rayism. The simplified forms and bright colors point to his Neo-primitivist work.

Louis Lozowick
Ludvinovka, Russian Empire (now Ukraine) 1892–1973 New
Orange, New Jersey

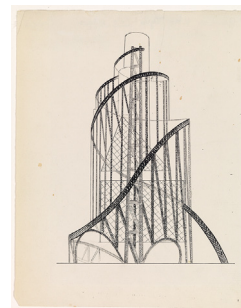
**Monument to the Third International after a photograph of
Tatlin's model, 1920–1925**
Pen and ink on laid paper

Gift of Thomas P. Whitney (Class of 1937)
AC 2001.232

Louis Lozowick moved to the United States in 1906, where he studied at the National Academy of Design. In 1920 he undertook a four-year trip to Europe, during which he visited the Soviet Union. He was impressed by the Constructivists and other avant-garde artists. On his return to the United States Lozowick published *Modern Russian Art*, which included a drawing of Vladimir Tatlin's tower.

Tatlin designed the tower in honor of the Third Communist International. Ivan Puni published Tatlin's drawings, and the wooden model was shown in parades, yet the gigantic project—1,312 feet high—was never executed. Nevertheless, to this day it conveys the spirit of modernity.

The open construction stands in contrast to the prevailing building practice of the early twentieth century. It symbolizes the new labor ethos in the young Soviet state. Four suspended glass volumes in the center were intended to house a radio station and observatory, and provide space for gatherings of the Communist International Assembly and smaller meetings of other organizations.



Mikhail Ivanovich Merkushev
Russian, 1899–?

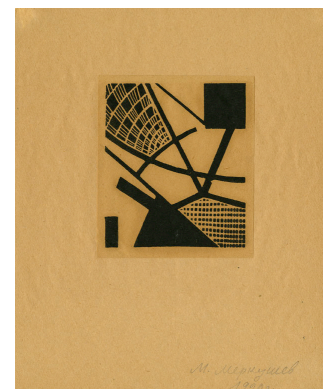
Four Abstract Designs, 1920

Linocut mounted on thin brown paper

Gift of Thomas P. Whitney (Class of 1937)
AC 2001.200–203

Merkushev created these four designs for the first issue of the journal *Vsadnik* (Horseman). The three issues of the journal appeared in the town of Kazan between 1920 and 1922. It was one of the few publications in the south of Russia, advancing the technique of printing as a form of artistic expression in its own right. The members of *Vsadnik* were avant-garde artists exploring new forms and aiming to introduce contemporary Western European and Russian art to a wider audience.

The prints' patterns reflect the breadth of artistic approaches at the time. They play with geometrical abstraction, reflecting Constructivism, and organic abstraction, suggesting Kandinsky's lyricism. The largest image appears to have its roots in a folk motif, while the letters suggest avant-garde nonsense texts.



Liubov' Sergeevna Popova
Ivanovskoe, Russian Empire 1889–1924 Moscow

Cubist Still Life, 1914

Oil on canvas

Gift of Thomas P. Whitney (Class of 1937)
AC 2001.53



In 1914 Popova had just returned from an extended stay in Paris and a trip to Italy. *Cubist Still Life* reflects her fascination with French Cubism and Italian Futurism. The painting is actually a specifically Russian amalgamation of the two movements. She features Cubism by breaking up the object into pieces and rearranging them on the surface. The resulting structure is reminiscent of reflecting glass facets. Yet the curved lines seem to give the painting's elements momentum. This is where Futurism comes into play, which is about movement and speed. While Cubofuturism was only one movement in Russia's many artistic experiments during the first third of the twentieth century, Popova created a significant part of her oeuvre in this style.

Liubov' Sergeevna Popova
Ivanovskoe, Russian Empire 1889–1924 Moscow

Geometric Composition, ca. 1921

Gouache over pencil on buff board

Gift of Thomas P. Whitney (Class of 1937)
AC 2001.52



Popova was a master of creating illusionary spaces with lines and colors on a two-dimensional surface. This work is from a 1921 series of paintings and drawings featuring complex geometrical and spatial constructions with strong use of linear elements. The artist called these works "experiments with painterly force structures" and titled some of them "Spatial Force Construction."

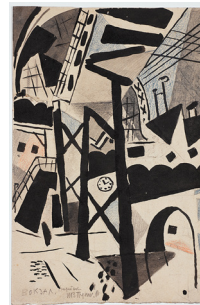
The straight lines and the white and dark shadows (or light reflections?) create a dynamic sphere beyond the traditional Euclidian three-dimensional space. Popova leaves a lot of surface unpainted to make use of the paper's natural texture, which adds to the effect of the composition. Artists of the avant-garde much valued the textures of painted and other surfaces and integrated them in substantial ways into their works.

Ivan Al'bertovich Puni
Kuokkala, Russian Empire (now Repino, Russia) 1892–1956 Paris

The Station at Vitebsk, 1919

Color crayons, pencil, and india ink on heavy paper

Gift of Thomas P. Whitney (Class of 1937)
AC 2001.242



In January 1919 Marc Chagall invited Puni to teach in his recently founded art school in Vitebsk, Chagall's home city in present-day Belarus. This drawing dates from the brief period Puni spent there. In the fall, he returned to Petrograd, and that winter he emigrated via Finland to Berlin.

Puni valued artistic independence above all else. He therefore refused to associate with any one movement or artist and sought new ways as soon as a program, such as Suprematism or Constructivism, became canonical in avant-garde circles.

The generous use of black ink and color crayon in *The Station at Vitebsk* is a feature of Puni's drawings from this period. The elements of the composition seem to fall apart in a manner typical of Russian Futurism. Yet Puni's work is not about velocity or progress. Over time he looked for ways to "humanize" art and render emotions, rather than explore new ways of abstraction.

Aleksandr Mikhailovich Rodchenko
St. Petersburg 1891–1956 Moscow

Compass Composition, 1915

Pen and ink and black ink on medium weight soft, textured off-white paper

Gift of Thomas P. Whitney (Class of 1937)
AC 2001.76



Rodchenko started his career in the ornamental and stylizing aesthetic environment of Symbolism and the World of Art. This drawing stands at the beginning of the artist's new orientation toward experiments with purely pictorial elements. It is one of a series of nonobjective compass-and-ruler drawings in which he explores the expressive possibilities of mechanically created lines and their relationship to flat areas of black or color. The interplay of white and black areas creates a dynamic effect and an ambivalent interchange of positive and negative forms and spaces.

Ol'ga Vladimirovna Rozanova
Malenki, Vladimir Province 1886–1918 Moscow

A Street, 1913

Linoleum cut on light brown paper

Gift of Thomas P. Whitney (Class of 1937)
AC 2001.73.2



Futurist Cityscape, 1913

Lithograph on thin brown paper

Gift of Thomas P. Whitney (Class of 1937)
AC 2001.73.4

By 1913 Rozanova had embraced Futurism, a style entirely focused on dynamism and aiming to “free the eye of the scales of atavism and culture.” Her appropriation of the style—one frequently associated with Italy— includes lines and curves that appear as if stirred by a whirlwind, thus conveying a sense of dissonance. The dynamic composition not only implies physical movement, but aspires to express inner, spiritual movement. While the landscapes are utterly abstracted, they testify to the artist’s deep connection to the Russian provinces.

These two prints first appeared in the Union of Youth’s (*Soiuz Molodezhi*) third publication in 1913. Union of Youth was an association of Russian avant-garde painters active in St. Petersburg from 1910 to 1914. The group saw itself in opposition to the conservatism of contemporary art and exhibition societies. Lerkii Zheverzheev acted as its president and financed the group, which functioned mostly as an exhibiting society.

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Georgii Avgustovich Stenberg
Moscow 1900–1933 Moscow

Extinguish, 1920s

Brush, india ink, and watercolor on laid watermarked paper

Gift of Thomas P. Whitney (Class of 1937)

AC 2001.254



Georgii Stenberg became famous as a designer of movie posters, which he created with his brother Vladimir Stenberg. In the 1920s he was associated with the Constructivist movement, and from 1922 until the end of the decade he created stage designs and costumes for Tairov's Chamber Theater in Moscow. During this period he developed an understanding of Constructivism as design.

The drawing *Extinguish* is probably a theater-related sketch. The Roman numeral II indicates a specific part of a play (such as the second act or scene 2), and on the back it bears fragmentary drawings, perhaps costumes for the play *Saint Joan* by George Bernard Shaw, which Stenberg designed.

Varvara Fedorovna Stepanova
Kaunas, Lithuania 1894–1958 Moscow

May 12, '26 to Moni, 1926

Collage on paper

Gift of Thomas P. Whitney (Class of 1937)

AC 2001.81

This collage is a birthday card for Solomon Telingater, who was himself a renowned collage artist. The text says “Mone”—a diminutive form of Solomon—“May 12, '26.” The date refers to the Gregorian calendar, which was introduced in Russia only with the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917. When Telingater was born, in 1903, his birthday would have been on April 29. The large red wrapper came from a kind of candy caramel of the brand Borzhom, referring to Telingater’s origin, the Republic of Georgia. The collaged text on the right border of the wrapper says: “The fly is our enemy. / Abortion as social evil. / The trial of the husband who beat his wife. / Sexual abstinence and onanism.”

In the collage Stepanova combines popular culture, political propaganda—the Cyrillic “B” in her monogram on the lower right recalls the font used in the Socialist Party newspaper *Pravda*—and Constructivism. The colors red, black, and white and the geometrical shapes reference this artistic movement, for which the artist strongly advocated.

