***Faktura***

*Faktura,* literally “texture”, is related to the Russian avant-garde’s preoccupation with the fundamental principles of the creative process. The term, applied to a work of art, addresses the way in which materials are used, the processes, the surrounding environment, and the artistic devices; it characterises the textural structure of a work of art and the manner by which it was constructed. As a creative principle, it rejects a pictorial space based on perspective and the illusion of three-dimensional space projected onto a flat canvas. The Russian formalist critic Viktor Shklovsky considered *faktura* to be the single most important quality of an object of art as a constructed object: it is the evidence of its having been made. He applied the term to poetic writing as well as the visual arts; in both cases *faktura* offered a visual demonstration of the properties inherent in a material or construction: “The whole effort of a poet and a painter is aimed first and foremost at creating a continuous and thoroughly palpable object, an object with a *faktura*.” The term *faktura* remained a fluidconcept during the 1910s, its essential qualities being further defined and developed by members of the avant-garde from 1913 well into the mid-1920s. While *faktura*, as initially used by members of the early Russian avant-garde, was characterized by the use of natural materials and a holistic-metaphysical approach to art, it was later adapted by the Constructivists to conform to a strictly materialist ideology and utilitarian orientation in artistic production.

Discussion and use of the term by the early Russian avant-garde is best reflected in the publications of the St. Petersburg artist group *Soiuz Molodezhi* [*Union of Youth*] and in Hans Voldemar Matvejs’ (pseudonym Vladimir Markov) 1914 book *Printsipy tvorchestva v plasticheskikh iskusstvakh: faktura* [*Creative Principles in the Plastic Arts: Faktura*], in which Matvejs initially defines *faktura* as “the condition of a painting’s surface that is perceivable to our eyes and senses” but also acknowledges that the term can be applied to sculpture, architecture and other art forms in which the use of color, sound, or some other technique produces a particular sensation in the viewer. Matvejs further distinguished between *material* (choice of material, surface luster, pigment) and *non-material* *faktura* (line quality, color combinations, contrast, choice of tools, and approach) and emphasized that *faktura* was dependent not only on the physical properties of a work of art but also on the artist’s personality, cultural background, and technical skills and was shaped by the artistic traditions, social environment, and historical context in which a work is created. In the 1920s the term was re-interpreted by the Constructivists, among them Aleksei Gan, Nikolai Tarabukin, and Vladimir Tatlin, to refer to a strictly materialist ideology and utilitarian orientation in artistic production. With *faktura*, they defined the conscious working of the material as a whole, in an expedient and appropriate manner without hampering the tectonics or construction of a work. Tatlin married Matvejs’ metaphysical interpretation of *faktura* with the Constructivists’ concern for material and energetic qualities; he insisted that the artist think more broadly about the choice of materials and subsequently search for the prerequisite for form within the material itself.

References and further reading:

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Viktor Shklovsky, “O fakture i kontrrel’efakh” [On Faktura and Counter-Reliefs], *Zhizn’ iskusstva* [Life of Art], October 20, 1920. English translation in Larissa Zhadova, ed., *Tatlin*, London: Thames and Hudson, 1988, 341.

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Margit Rowell, “Vladimir Tatlin: Form/Faktura,” *October* 7 (Winter 1978): 83-108.

Masahiko Oishi, “O Poniatii ‘Faktura’” [On the Meaning of Faktura], *Japanese Slavic and East European Studies*, 8 (1987): 54-55.

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Suggested image:

Vladimir Tatlin, *Painterly Relief. Selection of Materials*, iron, plaster, glass, asphalt, 1914, photograph from Nikolai Punin, *Tatlin. Protiv Kubizma* (Petrograd 1921) http://www.artopos.org/collections/russianav/317-en.html