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| Rayism |
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| An abstract and non-objective style of painting, Rayism (‘Luchizm’) was pioneered by the Russian artist Mikhail Larionov in early 1912. The style represented the first theoretically coherent and practically consistent response on the part of the Russian avant-garde to the challenges of French Cubism and Italian Futurism. In divorcing art from figuration and in its emphasis on the purely formal qualities of painting, Rayism prepared the way for the development of both Suprematism and Constructivism. Larionov’s innovative style was practised chiefly by those artists in his immediate orbit: painters such as Natalia Goncharova, Alexander Shevchenko and Mikhail Le-Dantiyu, who belonged to the Donkey’s Tail and Target group. Whilst Rayism had a limited life-span in Russia, being overtaken by Suprematism in 1915, Larionov and Goncharova continued to practice the style throughout their careers, executing Rayist paintings right up to the 1950s.  In its earliest phase, known as ‘Realistic Rayism’ (‘Realistichesky luchizm’), the style proceeded from Larionov’s interest in optics and Impressionist colour theory and specifically from the idea that the colour, contour and form of our world is defined by rays of light reflected from all material objects. According to Larionov’s booklet *Rayism* (*Luchizm*) of 1912, his initial aim was to explore the nature of visual perception as it exists before the brain converts what we see into a comprehensible form. |
| An abstract and non-objective style of painting, Rayism (‘Luchizm’) was pioneered by the Russian artist Mikhail Larionov in early 1912.  File:NataliaGoncharova.png  Figure Natalia Goncharova: *Rayist Fountain*, 1914, Oil on canvas, 140.6x87.3cm. Sam and Ayla Zacks Collection, The Israel Museum, Jerusalem.  [[Source: http://www.imj.org.il/images/corridor/Bezalel/modern/New%20Modern%20Scans/g-h-i/Gontcharova-%20Rayonist%20Garden%20Park~%20L-B81\_056.jpg]]  The style represented the first theoretically coherent and practically consistent response on the part of the Russian avant-garde to the challenges of French Cubism and Italian Futurism. In divorcing art from figuration and in its emphasis on the purely formal qualities of painting, Rayism prepared the way for the development of both Suprematism and Constructivism. Larionov’s innovative style was practised chiefly by those artists in his immediate orbit: painters such as Natalia Goncharova, Alexander Shevchenko and Mikhail Le-Dantiyu, who belonged to the Donkey’s Tail and Target group. Whilst Rayism had a limited life-span in Russia, being overtaken by Suprematism in 1915, Larionov and Goncharova continued to practice the style throughout their careers, executing Rayist paintings right up to the 1950s.  In its earliest phase, known as ‘Realistic Rayism’ (‘Realistichesky luchizm’), the style proceeded from Larionov’s interest in optics and Impressionist colour theory and specifically from the idea that the colour, contour and form of our world is defined by rays of light reflected from all material objects. According to Larionov’s booklet *Rayism* (*Luchizm*) of 1912, his initial aim was to explore the nature of visual perception as it exists before the brain converts what we see into a comprehensible form. This theory, however, was never methodically articulated at the level of practice. In Larionov’s *Glass: Rayist Method* of 1912 (New York: Guggenheim) the artist fragments the picture space of the painting by lines and chevrons of paint which represent the light rays reflected from the objects in the picture, but not in any precise or scientific manner. The process of abstraction is taken a stage further in *Rayist Cockerel* of 1912 (St. Petersburg: Russian Museum) in which both the cockerel and its surrounding picture space explode with lines of prismatic colour. Comparative works by Goncharova include *Cats: Rayist Perception in Rose, Black and Yellow* (New York: Guggenheim) and *Green and Yellow Forest* (Stuttgart: Staatsgalerie) both from 1912.  During 1913 Larionov’s theory and practice evolved very rapidly, leading to a highly innovative form of abstract creation called ‘Pnemuo-Rayism’ (Pnevmo-Luchizm). At the level of practice Larionov now abolished the last remanants of figuration so that paintings such as *Rayism: Domination of Red* (New York: MOMA) and *Red and Blue Rayism* (Ufa: Bashkir State Art Museum), both of 1913, took the form of dynamic intersections of coloured lines and chevrons of paint creating a complex and shifting ‘optical’ space. In some works, such as *Rayism: Sunny Day* (Paris: MNAM) of 1914 he began to employ mixed media, building the work out into real space with papier-maché*.* In theoretical terms Larionov explored a more metaphysical view of Rayism, equating the non-objective picture space of his paintings with the fourth dimension of space, an idea common in contemporary mysticism and popular philosophy. Goncharova also made a substantial contribution to this later phase of Rayism. Most notable are her series of *Rayist Perceptions* (New York, MOMA), and the visually stunning *Rayist Fountain* (Jerusalem: Israel Museum).  Whilst Rayism received much critical attention, both positive and negative, in the contemporary Russian art press, it received its greatest accolade from the poet and cubist critic Guillaume Apollinaire, who praised the style as a ‘genuine aesthetic discovery’ (*Nathalie de Gontcharowa et Michel Larionow*, exhibition catalogue Galerie Paul Guillaume, Paris, 1914). Subsequently, Rayism fell into critical obscurity until 1936 when Alfred Barr finally established its artistic and historical significance in his famous «Cubism and Abstract Art» exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. |
| Further reading:  (A. Parton, Russian 'Rayism', the Work and Theory of Mikhail Larionov and Natalya Goncharova 1912-1914: Ouspensky's Four-Dimensional Super Race?)  (Compton)  (Dabrowski)  (Larionov, Luchizm)  (Larionov and Goncharova, “Luchisty i budushchniki: Manifest”)  (Larionov and Goncharova, Luchistskaia zhivopis)  (M. Larionov)  (A. Parton, Mikhail Larionov and the Russian Avant-Garde)  (A. Parton, Goncharova: The Art and Design of Natalia Goncharova)  (Warren) |