

1921 PROGRAM OF THE FIRST WORKING GROUP OF CONSTRUCTIVISTS

Alexander Rodchenko and Varvara Stepanova

AS A COMMITTED COMMUNIST, *Alexander Rodchenko (1891–1956)* was one of the first artists to support the Bolsheviks after the 1917 Russian Revolution. In 1921, he abandoned easel painting and sculpture to concentrate instead on the more socially useful activities of design, typography, and photography. Rodchenko was a founding member of *Inkhuk*, the Institute of Artistic Culture, which operated in Moscow from 1920 to 1924, and the Working Group of Constructivists was formed in March 1921 during his time as the institute's director. The Constructivist program, coauthored by Rodchenko and his partner *Varvara Stepanova (1894–1958)*—also a leading member of *Inkhuk*—was approved at the group's third meeting in April 1921 and published in slightly modified form the following year. It proposes a basis for working, in the service of "scientific communism," which is diametrically opposed to the ideological imperatives of commercial graphic design as it was then emerging in the United States and would later develop. Old forms of art would wither as "constructive life" became the art of the future.—RP

The Group of Constructivists has set itself the task of finding the communistic expression of material structures.

In approaching its task, the group insists on the need to synthesize the ideological aspect with the formal for the real transference of laboratory work on to the rails of practical activity.

Therefore, at the time of its establishment, the group's program in its ideological aspect pointed out that:

1. Our sole ideology is scientific communism based on the theory of historical materialism.
2. The theoretical interpretation and assimilation of the experience of Soviet construction must impel the group to turn away from experimental activity 'removed from life' towards real experimentation.
3. In order to master the creation of practical structures in a really scientific and disciplined way, the Constructivists have established three disciplines: *Tectonics*, *Faktura*, and *Construction*.
 - A. Tectonics or the tectonic style is tempered and formed on the one hand from the properties of communism and on the other from the expedient use of industrial material.
 - B. *Faktura* is the organic state of the worked material or the resulting new state of its organism. Therefore, the group considers that *faktura* is material consciously worked and expediently used, without hampering the construction or restricting the tectonics.

C. Construction should be understood as the organizational function of Constructivism.

If tectonics comprises the relationship between the ideological and the formal, which gives unity to the practical design, and *faktura* is the material, the Construction reveals the very process of that structuring.

In this way, the third discipline is the discipline of the realization of the design through the use of the worked material.

The Material. The material as substance and matter. Its investigation and industrial application, properties and significance. Furthermore, time, space, volume, plane, color, line, and light are also material for the Constructivists, without which they cannot construct material structures.

The Immediate Tasks of the Group

1. In the ideological sphere:

To prove theoretically and practically the incompatibility of aesthetic activity with the functions of intellectual and material production.

The real participation of intellectual and material production as an equal element in the creation of communist culture.

2. In the practical sphere:

To publish a statement.

To publish a weekly paper, *VIP* [*Vestnik Intellektual'nogo Proizvodstva*; the *Herald of Intellectual Production*].

To print brochures and leaflets on questions relating to the activities of the group.

To construct designs.

To organize exhibitions.

To establish links with all the Production Boards and Centers of that unified Soviet machine, which in fact practically shapes and produces the emergent forms of the communist way of life.

3. In the agitational sphere:

i. The Group declares uncompromising war on art.

ii. It asserts that the artistic culture of the past is unacceptable for the communistic forms of Constructivist structures.

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