

Constructing Revolution: Soviet Propaganda Posters from between the World Wars
September 24, 2017–February 11, 2018

Bowdoin College Museum of Art

OSHER GALLERY

Constructing Revolution: Soviet Propaganda Posters from between the World Wars

Constructing Revolution explores the remarkable and wide-ranging body of propaganda posters as an artistic consequence of the 1917 Russian Revolution. Marking its centennial, this exhibition delves into a relatively short-lived era of unprecedented experimentation and utopian idealism, which produced some of the most iconic images in the history of graphic design.

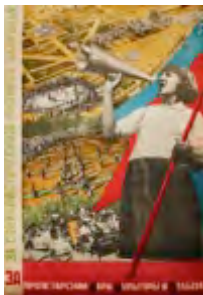
The eruption of the First World War, the Russian revolutions of 1905 and 1917, and the subsequent civil war broke down established political and social structures and brought an end to the Tsarist Empire. Russia was split into antagonistic worlds: the Bolsheviks and the enemy, the proletariat and the exploiters, the collective and the private, the future and the past. The deft manipulation of public opinion was integral to the violent class struggle. Having seized power in 1917, the Bolsheviks immediately recognized posters as a critical means to tout the Revolution's triumph and ensure its spread. Posters supplied the new iconography, converting Communist aspirations into readily accessible, urgent, public art.

This exhibition surveys genres and methods of early Soviet poster design and introduces the most prominent artists of the movement. Reflecting the turbulent and ultimately tragic history of Russia in the 1920s and 1930s, it charts the formative decades of the USSR and demonstrates the tight bond between Soviet art and ideology.

All works in this exhibition are generously lent by Svetlana and Eric Silverman '85, P'19.



UNKNOWN ARTIST
October, 1927



VERA ADAMOVNA GITSEVICH
Russian, 1897–1976
For the Proletarian Park of Culture and Leisure, 1932



DMITRY MOOR (DMITRY STAKHIEVICH ORLOV)

Russian, 1883–1946

Death to World Imperialism, 1919

During the civil war years the armies of foreign (capitalist) countries and nationalist Russian White forces fought Soviet rule. This striking poster sums up the perceived dangers facing the new socialist order. A monstrous green dragon wrapping itself around a factory represents the attempt of world imperialism to strangle the state-owned economy. Symbolically charged colors dominate—red represents the Soviets, while black stands for various antagonistic forces.



DMITRY MOOR (DMITRY STAKHIEVICH ORLOV)

Russian, 1883–1946

Did You Volunteer?, 1920

Posters by Dmitry Moor and others integrated powerful visual and verbal rhetoric to address the urgent issues of the day and served as an important weapon of Bolshevik class warfare. Moor created this iconic image of a Red Army recruiting officer, allegedly in a single night. It borrows from two precedents: James Montgomery Flagg's famous portrait of "Uncle Sam," first published in 1916 with the title "What Are You Doing for Preparedness?" and Alfred Leete's 1914 portrayal of Lord Kitchener declaring "Your country needs YOU."



DMITRY MOOR (DMITRY STAKHIEVICH ORLOV)

Russian, 1883–1946

October 1917–October 1920. Long Live the Worldwide Red October!, 1920

Created in 1920, this poster shows a Red Army cavalry soldier joined by the English, Italian, and French proletariat in crushing enemy armies. The artist uses the traditional "before and after" comparison, reinforcing the message of the spreading international revolution. Dmitry Moor was educated in Kiev, Kharkov, and Moscow but never completed his formal artistic training. Before the Revolution he submitted political cartoons for illustrated periodicals. During World War I he began to design patriotic *lubki* (originally, vernacular popular woodblock prints, and later lithographs). After the October Revolution, he forged a successful career as a designer of political posters. In 1922, in a special decree on behalf of the Soviet state, Trotsky declared Moor "a hero of the pencil and the paintbrush who raised the fighting spirit of the Red Army and lit up the path of struggle."



NIKOLAI MIKHAILOVICH KOCHERGIN

Russian, 1897–1974

Wrangel is Coming—to the Arms, Proletariat, 1920

This caricature of a warrior illustrates the use of mass propaganda as a weapon. Baron Pyotr Wrangel (Wrangel) was the leading commanding officer of the anti-Bolshevik White Guards during the Civil War. He is depicted in the traditional Cossack cavalry uniform—a symbol of tsarist power. The Soviets fought such military might with derisive mass propaganda. The poster became a weapon and its production was indeed often relegated to the Litizdat division of the Political Directorate of the Revolutionary Military Council, then overseen by Leon Trotsky. (This Bolshevik, a Soviet politician, and an astute art critic and radical thinker was assassinated on Joseph Stalin’s orders in 1940.) In 1919, the writer Leonid Andreev boasted: “In the matter of world propaganda and the art of fighting with the world, the Bolsheviks could teach even the Germans.



MIKHAIL MIKHAILOVICH CHEREMNYKH

Russian, 1890–1962

The Victory of the Revolution is in Cooperation of Workers and Peasants, 1925



VIKTOR NIKOLAEVICH DENISOV (DENI)

Russian, 1893–1946

Rot Front! (Red Front!), 1932

During the Weimar Republic, the Communist Party of Germany established the Roter Frontkämpferbund (RFB), or “Alliance of Red Front-Fighters,” a paramilitary organization. The greeting “Rot Front!,” accompanied by a raised clenched fist, became a symbol of the RFB. This image of a giant Rot Front fighter, trampling Western banks and stock exchange buildings, is accompanied by a poem by a popular Russian-Ukrainian Soviet poet-propagandist Demyan Bedny (1883–1945). Bedny’s lines promise the imminent end of the word “capital,” crushed by the worldwide alliance of the Red Front fighters.



VALENTINA NIKIFOROVNA KULAGINA

Russian, 1902–1987

1905 Road to October, 1929

Constructing Revolution: Soviet Propaganda Posters from between the World Wars
September 24, 2017–February 11, 2018



VALENTINA NIKIFOROVNA KULAGINA
Russian, 1902–1987
Ready to Respond, 1931



UNKNOWN ARTIST
Young Bolsheviks, 1933



UNKNOWN ARTIST
Literary-Instructional Trains, ca. 1920

This poster's text reads in part: "The living, spoken word, books, pictures, theater—everything which can carry a little light into the countryside and the dark corners of Russia—that is what the literary-instructional train carries." It refers to the new distribution forms including trains, barges, vans, and cars, which carried activists, pamphlets, and cinematic equipment to the far corners of Russia. Used for the ideological conditioning of the populace, mass-media agitational propaganda was injected into all aspects of public and private life. At its height, the propaganda campaign included agitation messages on candy wrappers, cigarette cartons, and other types of merchandise packaging. The effort was overseen by the Department of Agitation and Propaganda, which had been established in 1920 by the Central Committee—the highest body of the Communist Party.



IVAN ANDREEVICH MALYUTIN
Russian, 1891–1932
To the Polish Front!, 1920

This poster addresses the Polish-Soviet War of 1919–1921, which involved Soviet Russian and Soviet Ukrainian soldiers fighting the Second Polish Republic and the Ukrainian People's Republic. It reads: "The commune strengthens with the bullets' song; comrades, let us triple our strength with the rifle." Breaking with the traditional poster design of a single dominant image with an integrated text, the new graphics combined the conventions of European Chéret-style posters and popular broadsides, along with the narrative strategies of Russian icons. Depending on the available materials, such ROSTA Window compositions ranged from a single image to

Constructing Revolution: Soviet Propaganda Posters from between the World Wars
September 24, 2017–February 11, 2018

multiple panels arranged in a sequence. Frequently versified, the captions quoted newspaper headlines and decrees issued by the government. Logos, acronyms, and popular slogans were used ubiquitously, but with extreme economy.



VIKTOR NIKOLAEVICH DENISOV (DENI)

Russian, 1893–1946

Manifesto of Baron Wrangel: All Power for Landowners! For Workers and Peasants— a Lash, 1920

ROSTA Windows

Although Lenin negotiated peace with Germany in 1917, effectively ending Russia's involvement in World War I, he could not avoid a civil war, which raged from 1918 until 1921. The Bolsheviks faced opposition from numerous groups that included monarchists, militarists, and foreign nations. Collectively, they were known as the Whites, while the Bolsheviks were the Reds. A brilliant strategist, Leon Trotsky became Commissar of War in the Bolshevik government and created the Red Army from the Red Guards (the Bolshevik workers militias), which eventually won the Russian Civil War.

ROSTA (Russian Telegraph Agency) Windows were unique in the patriotic propaganda poster campaign. From 1919 to 1922, ROSTA Windows were issued daily in Moscow and Petrograd (now St. Petersburg) and distributed throughout the country. Reproduced manually using cardboard cutout stencils and linocuts, and finished by hand, they were strategically displayed in the empty shop windows of the war-devastated country. Less time-consuming in production than lithographed posters, this public broadcast medium instantly reacted to the frantic happenings of the day with the speed of a newspaper. Suitable for viewing from a distance, the eye-catching posters used *lubok*-style sequences to unfold a dramatized plot with rhyming captions. Placed in well-trafficked areas, the window instructed, campaigned, and entertained the public with simple images and catchy slogans.



VLADIMIR VLADIMIROVICH MAYAKOVSKY

Russian, 1893–1930

and

ANTON LAVINSKY

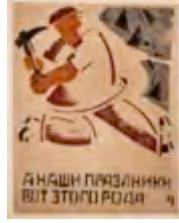
Russian, 1893–1968

ROSTA Window: "May 1—If a Celebration, Then for All the People (5)", 1920

Constructing Revolution: Soviet Propaganda Posters from between the World Wars
 September 24, 2017–February 11, 2018



VLADIMIR VLADIMIROVICH MAYAKOVSKY
 Russian, 1893–1930
 and
 ANTON LAVINSKY
 Russian, 1893–1968



ROSTA Windows, 1920

The texts for these posters read in part: (1) “What type of holiday is Christmas?” (2) “Think for yourself; the rich celebrated” (3) “And you had to watch” (4) “Our holidays are of this order.” Despite basic supplies and limited time, such posters kept pace with the rapidly evolving political and social priorities. They served as a “protocol record of a most difficult three-year period of revolutionary struggle, conveyed by means of spots of paint and the echoing sound of slogans,” recalled Vladimir Mayakovsky, a renowned Futurist artist and revolutionary. Praised by Stalin as the “best, most talented” Soviet poet, Mayakovsky was also a painter, graphic designer, actor, LEF (the Left Front of the Arts) theorist, and writer. Collaborating with the cartoonist Mikhail Chermnykh and the young painter Ivan Malyutin, Mayakovsky created over 500 ROSTA Windows and defined the genre’s iconic style, which is now recognized as one of the most significant artistic accomplishments of the early Revolution.



VLADIMIR VLADIMIROVICH MAYAKOVSKY
 Russian, 1893–1930
ROSTA Windows, 1920

The texts for these posters read in part: (1) “This week” (2) “Help the starving not in word” (3) “But in deed” (4) “No matter how hungry [you are] here” (5) “Remember, comrade, Volga region is worse off” (6) “For four years, the flag has been flying” (7) “What has sustained us for so long?” (8) “Who fed us?”

Constructing Revolution: Soviet Propaganda Posters from between the World Wars
September 24, 2017–February 11, 2018



VLADIMIR VLADIMIROVICH MAYAKOVSKY

Russian, 1893–1930

ROSTA Windows, 1920

The texts for these posters read in part: (9) “Volga” (10) “Today, it is your turn to help, even if you don’t eat enough” (11) “Before you take a bite” (12) “Cut a half for the starving.”



VLADIMIR VLADIMIROVICH MAYAKOVSKY

Russian, 1893–1930

The rallying-cry of the Ukrainians and the Russians: the Polish Overlord Shall not Rule Over the Worker!, 1920



UNKNOWN ARTIST

The Bedfellows of Capitalism, 1927

HALFORD GALLERY

Soviet Iconography: What a Communist Ought to Be

During the 1920s and 1930s, innovative poster designers effectively established the USSR’s political iconography, in use until the State’s disintegration in 1991. To communicate Marxist-Leninist ideology to the broadest possible audience, the designers borrowed from a wide variety of sources: nineteenth-century Realism, the imagery of European revolutionary movements, Tsarist-era political art, satirical graphics, classical mythology, Orthodox icons, and popular and folk arts.

As economic development and social change became of prime national importance, new civic virtues were extolled. Photomontage posters came to a particular prominence. Combining photo-images of convincing documentary power in daring compositions, the avant-garde *photomonteurs* championed the Soviet dream of a perfected human. Surrounded by technology, these larger-than-life Supermen and -women triumphed over time and space, breaking new ground and new records, marching in formation, infinite in

Constructing Revolution: Soviet Propaganda Posters from between the World Wars
September 24, 2017–February 11, 2018

their extension—unanimous, but not faceless. The outstretched hand—the rhetorical synecdoche for the masses, was often juxtaposed with the colossal figures of Russia’s ideological leaders. These Bolshevik “living gods,” “saints,” and “martyrs” replaced venerated icons, guiding and reminding the people of the sacrifices made in the name of the Soviet citizens.



GUSTAV GUSTAVOVICH KLUTSIS

Russian, 1895–1938

Under the Banner of Lenin for Socialist Construction, 1930

Avant-garde artists questioned painting’s ability to represent reality in a moment of flux. They searched for the most effective modern communicative means while simultaneously waging a war against outlived bourgeois and aristocratic aesthetics. Photomontage provided a viable new language. Combining camera-derived factual content with political function, it delivered a new aesthetic possessing the pathos, impulse, and technical precision necessary for expressing the Socialist “truths.” Reprinted quickly, cheaply, and in large print runs, posters designed with the photomontage technique were the opposite of “fine art.”

Iconoclastic artists welcomed the October 1917 events and initially identified with the regime, making organizational, institutional, and theoretical commitments to the new Soviet ideology. “A new artistic form is a protest against the old, and in that struggle, lays the life and development of art,” wrote Roman Jacobson, a Futurist and theoretician, in 1919. Like him, Gustav Klutsis was an avant-garde artist. Until the Revolution denounced the avant-garde as “formalism,” he created versatile and inventive posters that went beyond the jingoistic state propaganda.



YAKOVLEVICH SENKIN

Russian, 1894–1963

Under the Banner of Lenin for the Second Five-Year Plan, 1931

By 1928 Stalin consolidated power, purged the government of his opponents, and replaced Lenin’s New Economic Policy (NEP) with the Five-Year Plan system. The forced industrialization and collectivization of agriculture brought the economy under the centralized control of the Party. Art was to follow. Vying for official status and for state support, factions struggled for dominance in all cultural sectors. Lenin distrusted avant-garde art, which he dismissed as “leftist” and “infantile.” By the 1930s, experimental art was replaced by realist work based on the well-established

representational language of academic painting. Various art movements were consolidated under one state-directed program. In 1934, Andrey Zhdanov defined the style that was to represent the Soviet aesthetic. Socialist Realism promoted “truth and historical correctness of the artistic depiction [...] combined with the tasks of the ideological transformation and education of the working people in the spirit of Socialism.”



GEORGI VLADIMIROVICH KIBARDIN

Russian, 1903–1963

Let Us Build a Dirigible Fleet in Lenin's Name, 1931

(Russian version)

The dirigible airship was a prominent symbol of Soviet power associated with technological progress. Dominating the sky, the aircraft speak about the Soviet people's—perhaps utopian—quest for the mastery of space. In this poster, photomontage is used as a means of defining the essence of collective aspirations, constructing a vision of the present with the Communist future in sight. The composition relies on a minimalist geometric framework of the interrelated diagonals. While Lenin is portrayed as the undying leader, Stalin's role is clearly visible as well. Among the names of old Bolsheviks showcased by the squadron of airships, Lenin's and Stalin's are the most prominent.

GEORGI VLADIMIROVICH KIBARDIN

Russian, 1903–1963

Let Us Build a Dirigible Fleet in Lenin's Name, 1931

(Ukranian version)



GUSTAV GUSTAVOVICH KLUTSIS

Russian, 1895–1938

Working Men and Women— Everyone to the Election of Soviets, 1930



GUSTAV GUSTAVOVICH KLUTSIS

Russian, 1895–1938

Development of Transport Is One of the Most Important Tasks in Fulfillment of the Five-Year Plan, 1929



UNKNOWN ARTIST

October – All-Union Day of the Shock Worker, We Report, 1931

The political poster is a “powerful tool in the reconstruction of the individual, his ideology, his way of life, his economic activity,” as well as a means of “entering the consciousness and heart of millions of people,” stated the Soviet artistic collective in 1931. To be a Soviet citizen meant not simply to commit to the idea but also to radically change one’s life. The socially progressive ways of thinking did not come from above, but instead, through a fundamental lifestyle reform, by thinking and acting in the interest of the collective. The posters worked to transform the beholder into a new man, guiding politically correct behavior. Viewers were called to interrogate their own senses of identity, to monitor their private and public lives, and to strive to fashion themselves after the ideals placed before them. Coincidentally, this poster appears in the background of a *Life Magazine* 1931 photograph by Margaret Bourke-White, the first American photographer to document life in the Soviet Union.



ALEXANDER MIKHAILOVICH RODCHENKO

Russian, 1891–1956

Shift – Edition Young Guard, ca. 1930

Having declared the death of painting in 1921, Alexander Rodchenko endeavored to merge art with life, turning to other mediums, including sculpture, graphic design, book illustration, and photography. Between 1920 and 1930, Rodchenko taught the ideas of Constructivism at the progressive Higher State Artistic and Technical Studios, known as *Vkhutemas*. His photographs and photomontages appeared in numerous avant-garde periodicals, such as *LEF* and *Novyi LEF*, and in such state-run publications as *Sovetskoe Foto* and *USSR in Construction*. However, his innovative style of representation was criticized by political cadres for its formalism and contrasted with Socialist Realism, the official artistic style adopted by the Soviet Union in 1934.

Constructing Revolution: Soviet Propaganda Posters from between the World Wars
September 24, 2017–February 11, 2018

GUSTAV GUSTAVOVICH KLUTSIS

Russian, 1895–1938

SERGEY YAKOVLEVICH SENKIN

Russian, 1894–1963

and

ALEXANDER MIKHAILOVICH RODCHENKO

Russian, 1891–1956

The Young Guard: For Lenin, 1924.

Front cover with letterpress photomontage illustration by Gustav Klutsis; sixteen letterpress photomontage illustrations, one by Aleksandr Rodchenko (1), ten by Gustav Klutsis (2–11), and five by Sergey Senkin (12–16). Moscow (February–March, 1924).

The Young Guard was one of the official publications of the Central Committee of Komsomol, the All-Union Lenin Communist Youth League. The ambitions of the editors become apparent in the 1924 February–March combined issue, published on the occasion of Lenin’s death, that was illustrated by the leading graphic artists with photomontages celebrating Lenin’s legacy. As a literary journal with a focus on young writers, the monthly was published in Moscow from 1922–1941 and later appeared as annual almanac (1948–1955). The magazine resumed monthly publication in 1956 and continues to promote young authors whose work reflects official ideology. In its early years, the magazine published longer novels in series, such as Mikhail Sholokhov’s *Virgin Soil Upturned* (1935), along with short stories, plays, memoirs, essays, and novellas. During the late 1930s, the journal also included works by foreign Communist authors such as Erich Maria Remarque, Romain Rolland, Bertolt Brecht, and Louis Aragon.

top row, left to right



ALEXANDER MIKHAILOVICH RODCHENKO

Russian, 1891–1956

Lenin Speaking, 1924



GUSTAV GUSTAVOVICH KLUTSIS

Russian, 1895–1938

Oppressed People of the Word, 1924

Constructing Revolution: Soviet Propaganda Posters from between the World Wars
September 24, 2017–February 11, 2018



GUSTAV GUSTAVOVICH KLUTSIS
Russian, 1895–1938
Lenin and Agriculture, 1924



GUSTAVOVICH KLUTSIS
Russian, 1895–1938
Comrade Lenin – Leader of the Masses, 1924



GUSTAV GUSTAVOVICH KLUTSIS
Russian, 1895–1938
Lenin Leads RKP (Russian Communist Party), 1924



GUSTAV GUSTAVOVICH KLUTSIS
Russian, 1895–1938
Lenin – Marxism in Action, 1924



GUSTAV GUSTAVOVICH KLUTSIS
Russian, 1895–1938
Instead of One, Millions Arisen, 1924



GUSTAV GUSTAVOVICH KLUTSIS
Russian, 1895–1938
Lenin, Krupskaya, and Children, 1924

Constructing Revolution: Soviet Propaganda Posters from between the World Wars
September 24, 2017–February 11, 2018

bottom row, left to right



GUSTAV GUSTAVOVICH KLUTSIS
Russian, 1895–1938
Turn Arms Against your Bourgeoisie, 1924



GUSTAV GUSTAVOVICH KLUTSIS
Russian, 1895–1938
Lenin Straddles Two Epochs in the Development of Humanity, 1924



GUSTAV GUSTAVOVICH KLUTSIS
Russian, 1895–1938
Lenin Lying in State, 1924



SERGEY YAKOVLEVICH SENKIN
Russian, 1894–1963
Lenin—Our Happiness and Strength, 1924



SERGEY YAKOVLEVICH SENKIN
Russian, 1894–1963
Lenin, 1924



SERGEY YAKOVLEVICH SENKIN
Russian, 1894–1963
Of All Arts—Cinema is the Most Necessary, 1924



SERGEY YAKOVLEVICH SENKIN
Russian, 1894–1963
RKP (Russian Communist Party)—Banner of Lenin, 1924

Constructing Revolution: Soviet Propaganda Posters from between the World Wars
September 24, 2017–February 11, 2018



SERGEY YAKOVLEVICH SENKIN
Russian, 1894–1963
Communist Organizations, 1924



SERGEY YAKOVLEVICH SENKIN
Russian, 1894–1963
Proletariat of All Countries Unite for Peace, 1929



UNKNOWN ARTIST
Radio. Let Us Create a Single Will Out of the Will of Millions, 1925

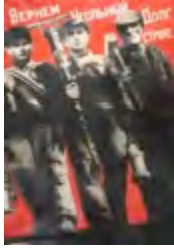
U.S.S.R. in Construction, 1933, Issues # 2, 9, 12

Following the introduction of new printing processes and innovations in photography and design, illustrated journals emerged as new powerful propaganda media. Young designers transferred their cutting-edge work into everyday print that reflected current political, economic, and cultural trends. Published in Russian, French, English, German, and Spanish, *U.S.S.R. in Construction* (1930–1940, 1949) portrayed the multinational Soviet Union as an emerging industrial power, showing a variety of large-scale industrial projects as well as documenting thriving arts, science, sports, and daily life. Each month introduced a theme that was elaborated in essays and illustrated with photographs by leading writers, journalists, and designers such as Alexander Rodchenko, El Lissitzky, Varvara Stepanova, Max Alpert, Arkady Shaikhet, Boris Ignatovich, and Semion Fridland.



UNKNOWN ARTIST
Give 100%, 1926

Constructing Revolution: Soviet Propaganda Posters from between the World Wars
September 24, 2017–February 11, 2018



GUSTAV GUSTAVOVICH KLUTSIS
Russian, 1895–1938
Let's Repay Our Country's Coal Debt, 1930

“Art must be at the same high level as socialist industry,” wrote Klutsis as he advanced graphic design according to principles of material integrity, functional expediency, and societal purpose. Like other avant-gardists, Klutsis saw artistic practice as a form of technology, whose function was the production of revolutionary subjectivity. His posters combined the language of abstraction, inherited from Kazimir Malevich’s Suprematism and Futurists’ experiments, with the mechanical precision of the ruler, the compass, and the camera. They showed modern characteristics such as plain typeface, experimental layout, abstract geometric forms, primary colors, and photomontage. Working toward “a synthesis of ideological and formal aspects,” Klutsis and other artists provided tools of education, agitation, and reform in all aspects of human life. They elevated art into a science, developed on the ideological Marxist platform, and turned it, in Klutsis’s words, into “a means of emotional and organizing influence on the psyche, in connection with the task of class struggle.”



GUSTAV GUSTAVOVICH KLUTSIS
Russian, 1895–1938
Give Millions of Skilled Workers for the New Factories and Institutes, 1931

As exemplified by this work, the posters of Gustav Klutsis feature a distinctive propaganda style. An enthusiastic supporter of the Revolution, he heralded photomontage as the medium best representative of the art of socialist construction, both for its documentary “truth” and for its relation to science and industry—spheres vital to building the Soviet state. He often staged his photographs, creating “revolutionary” *mise-en-scènes*. He then disassembled the images, reorganized, and pasted them on bold chromatic planes to create commanding visual tableaux. These tightly edited montages of decontextualized fragments of Soviet life were as far removed from factual reality as any Soviet propaganda.



A. Z. BLIK (?)
Sign up for the Urals Worker, 1924

Constructing Revolution: Soviet Propaganda Posters from between the World Wars
September 24, 2017–February 11, 2018



ALEXANDER MIKHAILOVICH RODCHENKO

Russian, 1891–1956

and

VKHUTEMAS (Higher State Artistic and Technical Workshops)

Red Moscow is the Heart of the World Revolution, 1920

Employing multiple fonts, fragmented, interpenetrating planes of color, and a dynamic composition, this Cubist-Futurist poster announces the Third International (Comintern) in two languages. The Kremlin—the twelfth century “fortress inside a city” that Lenin had elected as his residence—is silhouetted against the rising sun. The Spasskaya Tower, on which the Kremlin star was installed in 1935, the Oruzheynaya (Armory) Tower, and the Kremlin Senate represent different aspects of Soviet power. The large red star dominates the center. It is superimposed with the hammer and sickle, symbol of the worker-peasant union, as well as international proletarian unity. With this poster Rodchenko codified Soviet iconography.



BRIGADE KGK

(VICTOR BORISOVICH KORETSKY

Russian, 1909–1998,

VERA ADAMOVNA GITSEVICH

Russian, 1897–1976,

and

BORIS GEORGIEVICH KNOKLOK

Russian, 1903–1984)

USSR—The Strongest Agriculture in the World, 1931

Conceived by avant-garde artists, photomontage was quickly embraced in both popular culture and governmental propaganda. However, by the early 1930s photomontage, along with other experimental art, drew the ire of state leaders. They deemed it unintelligible to a large sector of the Soviet population, criticized the medium for being “formalist,” and found it to have a “rootless cosmopolitan” air. Using fragmentation and distortion as artistic devices now seemed unnecessary—even dangerous—and inappropriate for portraying Soviet life. Specifically, the works of Klutskis and Rodchenko were proclaimed foreign and mechanistic in their vision and arcane in their results. Under Stalin, the utopian aspirations of the artist-engineers yielded to a brutal dictatorship. Those unable to conform faced silence, exile, or death. Mayakovsky committed suicide (or was assassinated) in 1928, Klutskis was executed in 1938, Dmitry Bulanov was arrested in 1941 and died while serving his sentence.



BRIGADE KGK
(VICTOR BORISOVICH KORETSKY
Russian, 1909–1998,
VERA ADAMOVNA GITSEVICH
Russian, 1897–1976,
and
BORIS GEORGIEVICH KNOKLOK
Russian, 1903–1984)
Shock Workers, to the Battle for Cast Iron, 1934

Stakhanovite shock workers dominate this poster, as they seem to be towering over a large industrial site. This work represents a shift from the modernist fragmentation and experiments of space and scale to a coherent composition focused on and indeed glorifying labor. Socialist Realist photo-posters harnessed the documentary power of photography to new ends, which included the alteration of images explicitly to achieve greater fidelity to an ideological vision of reality. As Anatoly Lunacharsky instructed in 1931, “artists should not only describe what is, but [should also] show those forces which are not yet developed.” Because photographs were open to interpretation, “a special shoot was necessary” for the poster, as pointed out by Victor Koretsky, the most prolific and state-decorated Soviet poster designer.



VIKTOR BORISOVICH KORETSKY
Russian, 1909–1998
Working Men and Women of all Countries and the Oppressed Colonies, Raise the Banner of Lenin, 1932

In Koretsky’s composition, Lenin’s cutout head dominates the fragmented, variously scaled images of political rallies on the left and workers’ parades on the right. The text comes from Stalin and reads in part: “With the banner of Lenin, we were victorious in the struggles for the October Revolution. With the banner of Lenin, we have achieved decisive success in the battle for the victory of socialist construction. With the same banner, we will be victorious in the proletarian revolution for the entire world.” Born in Kiev in 1909, Viktor Koretsky belonged to a generation of Soviet-educated, state-employed Jewish artists who studied at the Moscow Secondary Professional Art School. Over the course of his successful fifty-year career, his posters consistently reflected official Soviet points of view. Twice awarded the Stalin Prize (1946, 1949), he was given the title of Honored Worker of Art of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic in 1961.

CENTER GALLERY

Constructing Revolution: Soviet Propaganda Posters from between the World Wars
September 24, 2017–February 11, 2018



GRIGORI MIHAILOVICH SHEGAL

Russian, 1889–1956

Down with Kitchen Slavery, 1929

Soviet Women: Bringing Revolution Home

Posters depicted free and equal women filled with Soviet spirit as they are assuming their roles. Women appeared active, strong, young, and often androgynous. The Bolsheviks' goal was to liberate all women and men from discrimination and exploitation, from sexual prejudice, and gender stereotypes. In their view, class, not gender, was the cause of inequality in social relations, and it was to cease in Soviet society. According to Russian politician Alexandra Kollontai, Communism would deliver women from "domestic slavery, so that their lives could be richer, fuller, happier and freer."

During the period of industrialization and collectivization, production, not reproduction, was shown as the workingwomen's principal role. These new women took the places that men had traditionally occupied: behind the tractor's wheel, working with machines, shooting guns, voting, playing sports, and marching in squadron formation. In the early years of the Bolshevik Revolution, women emerged even as weapon-wielding fighters. Women also claimed their place in the field of graphic design, coming to particular prominence in the early 1930s. The artists Vera Gitsevich, Valentina Kulagina, Natalia Pinus, and others successfully incorporated the newest styles and techniques into their artistic vocabulary.



NATALIA PINUS (NATALIA SERGEEVNA BUKHAROVA)

Russian, 1901–1986

Worker Women, Collective Farmers, Be in the Forefront, 1932

Constructing Revolution: Soviet Propaganda Posters from between the World Wars
September 24, 2017–February 11, 2018



VALENTINA NIKIFOROVNA KULAGINA

Russian, 1902–1987

Women Shock Workers and State Farmers, Join the Ranks of VKP (All State Communist Party), 1932

Emancipated from her feminine trappings, the new Soviet woman, dressed in unisex blue overalls, is masculine, powerful, and determined. She embodies both the new *kolkhoz* (state farm) woman who is ready to man the tractor, and the factory worker, ready to work at the bench. Her hair is hidden under a kerchief worn in the new style, with its ends tied behind rather than under the chin, as a peasant would have done. Together with red-colored flags and banners, the red kerchiefs become a symbol of the women's movement. The worker's energetic gesture imitates Lenin's oratorical style, and the copy of the Pravda under her arm further aligns her with the Party. Still today the newspaper serves as the organ of the Central Committee and is run by the Communist Party of the Russian Federation.



UNKNOWN ARTIST

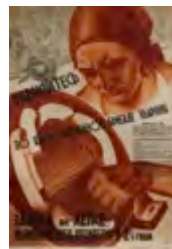
Women Workers, Take up Your Rifles, 1917



VALENTINA NIKIFOROVNA KULAGINA

Russian, 1902–1987

International Working Women's Day is the Day of Judging Socialist Competition, 1930



MARIA FELIKSOVNA BRI-BEIN

Russian, 1892–1968

Achieved the Five Year Plan in 2 1/2 Years, 1931



VALENTINA NIKIFOROVNA KULAGINA
Russian, 1902–1987
Women Workers Strengthen the Shock Brigades, 1931

The text of this poster reads: “Women workers, women shock workers strengthen the shock brigades, master technology, increase the ranks of proletariat specialists.” Artist Valentina Kulagina served at the time as one of the official designers for the Communist Party. This poster exemplifies her work during this last period of her professional career. Kulagina had studied at the State Free Art Studios where she built a reputation as exhibition designer. She cut short her education at the urging of her then-teacher and future husband, Gustav Klutsis. Subsequently, Kulagina frequently collaborated with Klutsis and worked on projects for the State Art Publishing Agency, the All-Union Society of Foreign Cultural Relations, and the All-Union Agricultural Exhibition. After Klutsis was arrested in 1938, she, too, disappeared from public view.



NATALIA PINUS (NATALIA SERGEEVNA BUKHAROVA)
Russian, 1901–1986
Woman Delegate, Shock Brigade Worker, 1931

Along with Kulagina, Natalia Pinus was known for her poster designs in the Constructivist style. She was a Russian and Soviet avant-garde painter, graphic artist, and illustrator. After studying with Klutsis, she began her career working for The Kursk Ninth Rifle Division Art Club, which she headed from 1918 to 1921. Pinus was a member of the October group, which also included Klutsis, Kulagina, Rodchenko, Mayakovsky, and others. Many of her posters focus on the image of the new Soviet woman. By the late 1930s, she had abandoned graphic art and became a landscape painter.



SERGEY YAKOVLEVICH SENKIN
Russian, 1894–1963
For the Many Millions of Lenin's Komsomol, 1931



ELIZAVETA VSEVOLODNA IGNATOVICH
Russian, 1903–1983
The Fight for the Polytechnic Schools is the Struggle for the Five-Year Plan, 1931

The text at the bottom of this poster reads: “The fight for the polytechnic schools is the struggle for the Five-Year Plan, for the cadres, for class-based Communist education.”



VERA ADAMOVNA GITSEVICH
Russian, 1897–1976
Let's Deploy the Construction of Canteens, 1932

In the new era, the Soviet government pledged to make housekeeping obsolete. Posters illustrated this optimistic promise with images of state-run communal kitchens, cafeterias, laundromats, nurseries, kindergartens, schools, and even orphanages—the institutions that would liberate women from domestic slavery. To foster the enlightened, clean-living, and healthy citizens, capable of constructing and defending communism, the state prescribed good hygiene, appropriate leisure activities, healthy sex practices, and productive and safe work habits. Still bearing the weight of housekeeping, women in particular had to be guided to meet the new hygiene standards, on both ideological and physiological levels. Stalin then shifted attention as he placed Soviet womanhood at the center of pro-natalism campaigns. Increasingly, posters propagated more conservative family policies by depicting women as caretakers—nurses, mothers, and homemakers.



VIKTOR BORISOVICH KORETSKY
Russian, 1909–1998
Sign Up for Nursing Courses, 1946

This poster depicts the Soviet version of the “Sisters of Mercy” to inspire young Soviet women. The design emphasizes the psychology of relatable heroes. Pared down from a multi-figure composition, Viktor Koretsky’s image appears monumental and evokes the tradition of Orthodox Christian icon veneration, without losing sight of the requirements of Socialist realist dogma. Religious images continued to be the most familiar symbolic language for the Soviet majority. For Orthodox believers, images of God had sacrosanct powers and were capable of transmitting not only human ideas but divine truths. The new Soviet ideology was also communicated through iconography that drew on the assumption of image-sacredness. In Koretsky’s posters, the “reality” factor of the staged photograph was combined with idealized painterly effects. Photos were retouched with a soft brush to achieve the illusion of a seamless, almost supernatural realism.



IVAN MIKHAILOVICH SHAGIN
Russian, 1904–1982
and
A. DRUZHKOVA
Russian
New Nurseries and Kindergartens, 1946



NIKOLAI NIKOLAEVICH ZHUKOV

Russian, 1908–1973

Surround Orphans with Affection, 1947

Here a mother shows how to surround orphans with affection, emulating an example set by a higher authority—Stalin himself. A small poster in the background depicts him as the ultimate paterfamilias of the Soviet people. This background image of Stalin holding a flower-bearing Buryat girl, Gel'ia Markizova, in his arms conceals the darker story about this orphan. It is based on a photograph from 1936. A year later, Gel'ia's father, Ardan Markizov, the Second Secretary of Buryat-Mongolian ASSR, was arrested as a Japanese spy and shot. Her mother was also arrested and sent to southern Kazakhstan, where she died. The early image of Gel'ia, however, continued to be widely circulated in both postcards and posters.



MIKHAIL OSKAROVICH DLUGACH

Russian, 1893–1988

Without a Right, 1926

Soviet Film Posters

The Soviet state took possession of the film industry in 1919 and over the next eleven years established both regional and national cinema organizations. The new role of cinema was to educate and to propagate communist ideology. Yet, this established form of popular entertainment retained its pre-revolutionary conventions and remained open to Western influences. As market practices resumed during the New Economic Policy period, the products of independent film companies and foreign cinema flooded Russia.

Central planning came to cinema in 1930. The All-Union Combine of the Movie-Photo Industry (*Soiuzkino*) began to govern all film products and oversee the distribution of foreign films, using the revenue from ticket sales to fund propaganda titles. Its auxiliary department, Reklam Film, produced posters, commissioning Georgii and Vladimir Stenberg, Grigorii Borisov, Mikhail Dlugach, and Rodchenko, among others, to create graphics in the service of the state.

To appeal to the masses, these young Soviet designers reinvented the art of the cinema poster, merging two important agitational tools—cinema and graphic arts. Direct and economical in style, the new posters were intended to both shock and to hold one's attention.

Constructing Revolution: Soviet Propaganda Posters from between the World Wars
September 24, 2017–February 11, 2018

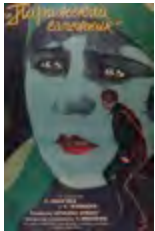


UNKNOWN ARTIST

Lady Bandit, 1927

“The cinema will amuse, enlighten, strikes the imagination by images, and liberates from the need of crossing the church’s threshold. The cinema is a great competitor not only of the tavern but also of the church!”

Leon Trotsky, 1923



MIKHAIL OSKAROVICH DLUGACH

Russian, 1893–1988

The Parisian Cobbler; Drama in Six Parts, 1928

The Parisian Cobbler, based on the novel by Nikolai Nikitin, was a direct criticism of “free love,” a film casting light on the Soviet-era dilemmas of family, childbearing, the role of women, and collective morality. In the period between 1921 and 1928, pre-revolutionary gender clichés returned to Soviet public space. Posters again capitalized on the enduring appeal of feminine beauty. Large, kohl-rimmed eyes, reminiscent of the flapper and the vamp, stared out from the posters that advertised Soviet films. The new heroine, often a Komsomol (Communist Union of Youth) member, was seduced and abandoned by her reckless lover—an irresponsible political activist or a more traditional hooligan—but eventually, thankfully, saved by the collective. The timeless drama of love and punishment played out on the Soviet silver screen again and again, enticing audiences, the ideological regime changes notwithstanding.



VLADIMIR AVGUSTOVICH STENBERG

Russian, 1899–1982

and

GEORGI AVGUSTOVICH STENBERG

Russian, 1900–1933

SEP (Collective Experimental Program), 1929

MEDIA GALLERY

DZIGA VERTOV (DAVID ABELEVICH KAUFMAN)

Russian, 1896–1954

A revolutionary filmmaker, poet, Soviet ideologue, and scientist, Dziga Vertov was born into a Jewish book-dealer's family in Białystok, Russian Empire (now Poland). Dziga Vertov—his *nom de guerre* translates as the “humming spinning top”—became committed early on to the Soviet cause. In 1918, he assumed administrative responsibility for the first Soviet newsreel series, *Kino-Nedelya* (Cinema Week) and produced forty-three issues between May 1918 and June 1919. In 1920–1921, he took part as administrator, producer, and film presenter on the “October Revolution” agitational train, which had a film-car equipped to shoot, develop, edit, and project film. These early examples of Vertov's films provide an invaluable record of life in the young Soviet Russia seized by civil war. Vertov went on to become one of the most influential theorists and directors of experimental non-fiction films and remains widely known for his *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929).

Kinonedelja No. 17, September 24, 1918

5 minutes 21 seconds

Courtesy Danish Film Institute

Kinonedelja No. 28, December 17, 1918

5 minutes 5 seconds

Courtesy Austrian Film Museum and Swedish Film Institute

Kinonedelja No. 32, January 24, 1919

6 minutes 51 seconds

Courtesy Austrian Film Museum, Vienna

Kinonedelja No. 17, September 24, 1918

5 minutes 21 seconds

Courtesy Danish Film Institute

Constructing Revolution: Soviet Propaganda Posters from between the World Wars
September 24, 2017–February 11, 2018

FOCUS GALLERY

Staging Socialist Happiness

Aimed at rapid industrialization and based on the Marxism-Leninism theory of the productive forces, Five-Year Plans were launched in 1928. While during the previous New Economic Policy period commercial advertisements had been tolerated, the new system monopolized the production of posters and utilized them to promote the economic restructuring. Collectivization and industrialization became important themes.

By the mid-1930s, the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party had fully regulated poster production through IZOGIZ (the State Fine Arts Publishing House), assigning themes and editing the works, as well as occasionally censoring images and texts. The Party also fostered a critical discussion of posters through professional organizations and public forums. The centralization of poster production, paralleled by an increase in output, ensured the uniformity, consistency, and maximum accessibility of the posters. The state demanded from artists to subordinate themselves to their audience in order to better serve the needs of the proletariat.



DMITRY ANATOLIEVICH BULANOV
Russian, 1898–1942
Industrial Loan, 1929



NIKOLAI CHOMOV
Russian 1903–1974
and
IURI MERKULOV
Russian
Fulfill the Five-Year Plan not in Five Years But in Four, 1930

Constructing Revolution: Soviet Propaganda Posters from between the World Wars
September 24, 2017–February 11, 2018

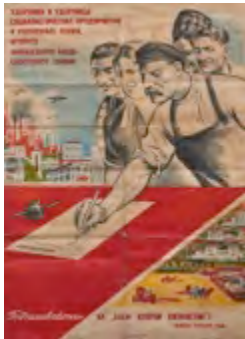


GUSTAV GUSTAVOVICH KLUTSIS

Russian, 1895–1938

Civilized Living – Productive Working, 1932

In 1935 Stalin famously proclaimed: “Life has improved!” The brutal conditions of the First Five-Year Plan and the famine years of 1928–1932 finally gave way to a brief period that was marked by an increase in quality of life. Soviet posters capitalized on the new found optimism with merry depictions of Soviet life, which, formally, shifted from photomontage to illusionistic photo-posters. Relying on the appeal of photo-truths, posters staged idealized depictions disconnected from the grim reality. They conveyed the goals and accomplishments of the young state, providing persuasive images of the realization of Soviet initiatives. These posters promoted subjects such as the transformed status of women, the improved conditions for workers, and the pursuits of physical welfare and culture.



IRAKLI MOISEEVICH TOIDZE

Russian, 1902–1985

Men and Women of the Socialist Shock Enterprises and Collective Farm Fields Strengthen the Financial Might of the Soviet Union, 1925

Propaganda posters provided a powerful visual script for achieving the future by projecting Soviet life in fanciful, yet easily comprehensible, lifelike images. The function of the arts changed. Initially, pioneering formal experiments with abstraction and montage educated viewers to see in a new way. Later propaganda, such as this poster, made citizens believe they were already living in this new world. This image of a unified group of workers of distinct ethnic types captures the solidarity among the workers and peasants and the unity among the members of the Soviet multinational state.



BORIS GRIGORIEVICH KLINCH (GARRY PETRUSHANSKY) Russian, 1892–1946

To the Worldwide October, 1933

Constructing Revolution: Soviet Propaganda Posters from between the World Wars
September 24, 2017–February 11, 2018



NIKOLAI ANDREEVICH DOLGORUKOV
Russian, 1902–1980
Proletariat of the Whole World Unite for the World October, 1932



ARTIST UNKNOWN
We Smite the False Shock Workers, 1931

Completing the Five-Year Plans ahead of schedule became a form of social competition, and the problem of “false shock workers” (*Izheudarniki*) emerged. Unlike super-workers performing feats of heroic labor, “false shock workers” inflated the reports of their labor in order to secure state-granted privileges that included premium pay, allocations for housing, goods, promotions into management, and publicity. This poster exhorts workers to become true shock workers, while crushing the head of a supine, hung-over impostor. A compositional wedge—reminiscent of El Lissitzky’s *Beat the Whites with the Red Wedge* (1919), with its black-and-white, cartoon-like vignettes—depicts the day-to-day bad behavior of a cheat. The hammer’s dynamic movement through space traces the contours of another Soviet symbol—the sickle—thus forming the iconic hammer-and-sickle symbol. Additionally, the red silhouette of Promethean foundry workers forms a single body, their tools becoming extensions of their bodies.



DMITRY ANATOLIEVICH BULANOV
Russian, 1898–1942
Our Brotherly Help to the Prisoners, 1927

As Soviet Russia gathered its strength in the 1930s, solidarity among the world proletariat became a prominent poster theme. The defense of the Communist world order was among the pressing agendas. In Bulanov’s *Our Brotherly Help to the Prisoners*, the upraised, muscled arm embodies the collective strength of the revolutionary masses, and the image of the prison bars being broken sends a message to the jailed workers of the world. The poster implicitly urges the proletariat masses to gather their strength and liberate themselves from the chains of capitalism with a show of force. Unlike highly detailed, complex photomontages, this

Constructing Revolution: Soviet Propaganda Posters from between the World Wars
September 24, 2017–February 11, 2018

powerful “weapon of the wall” uses strikingly simple visual vocabulary to summarize its message succinctly and effectively.



GUSTAV GUSTAVOVICH KLUTSIS
Russian, 1895–1938
Anti-Imperialist Exhibition, 1931



NIKOLAI VLADIMIROVICH TSIVCHINSKII
Russian, 1905–1988
The Victory of the Five-Year Plan is a Strike Against Capitalism, 1931

Work Safety Posters

Under IZOGIZ, poster production was divided into distinct specializations: commercial advertisements, film and theater, military, hygiene, education, industrial, political, and others. While the political poster was the most consequential and prestigious genre, graphics devoted to work conditions were less scrutinized, sometimes yielding refreshingly frank, often humorous glimpses into Soviet daily-life predicaments. Alcoholism was a frequently lambasted social ill. Work safety posters became a particularly prolific genre, frequently commissioned by the Central Museum of Labor Protection and Insurance. Typically, no single name was attached to a particular poster, and even prominent artists such as Mayakovsky worked anonymously on slogans and graphics.

Constructing Revolution: Soviet Propaganda Posters from between the World Wars
September 24, 2017–February 11, 2018

far left



UNKNOWN ARTIST
Do Not Re-attach Moving Belt by Hand, 1931

top row, left to right



UNKNOWN ARTIST
When Laying Without Scaffolding, 1931



UNKNOWN ARTIST
Check the Scaffold Strength, 1931



UNKNOWN ARTIST
Incorrect Suspension is Dangerous, 1931

Constructing Revolution: Soviet Propaganda Posters from between the World Wars
September 24, 2017–February 11, 2018



UNKNOWN ARTIST
Securely Ground Wires, 1931

bottom row, left to right



UNKNOWN ARTIST
Don't Stand on the Inside of Wire, 1930



UNKNOWN ARTIST
Circumvent Rolling Conveyor, 1931



UNKNOWN ARTIST
When Moving Wagons, Stand Left of Tracks, 1931

Constructing Revolution: Soviet Propaganda Posters from between the World Wars
September 24, 2017–February 11, 2018



UNKNOWN ARTIST
Watch Your Fingers, 1931