

LISSITZKY + **Part 1 – Victory over the Sun** **19/09/2009 – 05/09/2010**

The Van Abbemuseum hosts one of the world's biggest and most important collections of work by the Russian artist El Lissitzky (1890-1941). He was probably the most dynamic artist of his time. Lissitzky is highly important to the Van Abbemuseum. His work, his ideas and his artistic objectives correspond closely with the museum's own engagement with experimentation, radical creativity and public participation. Lissitzky was not a creator of static, self-contained works. His creativity was dynamic, public, a mass of plans and projects, bristling with life. The museum is keen to make that verve – that vitality – tangible for today's public. The *Lissitzky +* project is comprised of three exhibitions, each taking a specific theme, which over the coming three years will shed new light on Lissitzky's oeuvre. An entire floor of the museum's new building is being rearranged for these new presentations. *Victory over the Sun*, the futurist opera that received its premiere in St. Petersburg in 1913, is the focal point of the first exhibition.

'Victory over the Sun'

The Russian artist Kazimir Malevich designed the fantastic costumes and sets for this opera's premiere in 1913. The opera was staged for a second time after the Russian Revolution. This 1920 production was mounted in Vitebsk by members of Unovis (Advocates of new art), a group of artists who were striving after a new and dynamic form of art. Inspired by this performance, Lissitzky thought that it would also be possible to recast the work as an electromechanical show. He designed a number of figurines and a dynamic stage set for these doll-like figures. Besides an edition of the final result, the *Figurinnenmappe*, a portfolio of lithographs depicting several of the opera's characters, the Van Abbemuseum's collection includes unique sketches for these figurines and a number of printer's proofs.

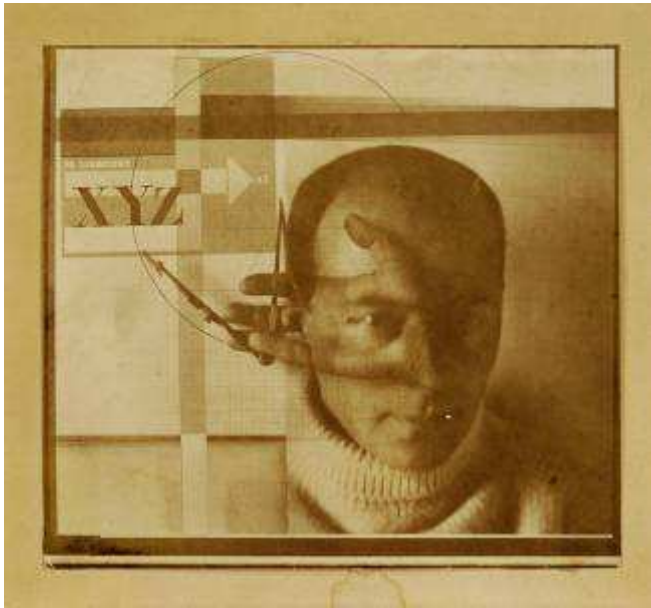
From two dimensions to three

Designs by Lissitzky will be presented in a three-dimensional form throughout the exhibition. For example, in the first room the red and black square from his book *The Story of Two Squares* will be realised as cubes, with the three-dimensional models based on the *Figurinnenmappe* displayed inside the red cube. In the introduction to this portfolio, Lissitzky actually provides instructions for anyone who would like to create three-dimensional models based on these illustrations. However, nobody has ever done this, and the Van Abbemuseum is seizing the initiative to have several of these models designed and realised. These will be installed in the spatial machinery that Lissitzky conceived, so that visitors can walk around them. The reconstruction of the renowned *Proun* space from the museum's collection will be presented in the black cube. The designs associated with the work inside the cubes will be displayed in the immediate vicinity of the red and black cubes. In the second room the focus shifts to Lissitzky as a graphic designer, while the third room sheds light on his international activities.



El Lissitzky, *Proun*, ca. 1922-1923. Photo Peter Cox

Lissitzky's architectural designs are presented in the fourth room, together with models of several designs by other artists and architects. The presentation in this space includes a towering maquette of his *Cloudprop* skyscraper. A blown-up version of the design for the *New Man* figurine is to be mounted on the window in the stairwell, while two enlargements of designs for propaganda posters on trams in Vitebsk will be presented on the walls each year. Room five is devoted to the story of how the Van Abbemuseum acquired its Lissitzky collection, and in the sixth room the public can find complementary information. Outside, a six-metre-high rendering of one of the figurines, the *Gravediggers*, specially constructed for this exhibition, is to be installed in the museum lake.



El Lissitzky, *The Constructor (Self portrait)*, 1924. Photo Peter Cox

The new, dynamic art

Lissitzky was a painter, a graphic artist and a designer of architecture, furniture, books and posters. He was a writer, a photographer and an indefatigable traveller. He was, moreover, a veritable mediator between the cultures of Soviet Russia and Western Europe. He collaborated closely with Kazimir Malevich, Hans Arp, Kurt Schwitters, László Moholy-Nagy, Theo van Doesburg and many other people, including architects, theatre directors and filmmakers from across Europe. Inspired by innovations in technology and science, in the 1920s these artists were searching for a new, revolutionary visual idiom with which they wanted to represent a utopian reality. Artists employed this visual idiom for the advancement of a new socialist society, most especially in Russia. Malevich became the mentor and later colleague of Lissitzky. It was through Malevich that Lissitzky became acquainted with Russian Futurism. The outbreak of the First World War forced the young Lissitzky to leave Germany, where he had been studying architecture. He returned to Russia, first to Moscow and then to Vitebsk (now in Belarus), where he taught at the People's Art School, which Chagall had founded there after the Revolution. Malevich moved to Vitebsk to teach at the academy, and Lissitzky subsequently became a convert to the dynamic, geometrical art that Malevich termed 'Suprematism'. This movement's ambition was to change the world. The past was dead; the only monuments of any significance were 'Monuments of the Future', as Lissitzky called them.

The museum has invited Professor Dr. John Milner of the Courtauld Institute in London, who is an authority on the Russian avant-garde, to devise a series of presentations around the Lissitzky collection. The aim of this series is to show Lissitzky's oeuvre, as well as work by his colleagues

and contemporaries, in several different contexts. This three-part series casts new light on Lissitzky's oeuvre and the context in which it was produced, as well as on Lissitzky as a person. Lissitzky could be regarded as an important precursor of the contemporary artists, someone who was aware of his social and political role as well as of the demands that he made of himself and others with regard to artistic innovation.

The second exhibition (September 2010 to September 2011) presents Lissitzky's work alongside the work of several radical female artists with whom he collaborated, while the third exhibition (September 2011 to September 2012) focuses on the dynamic human figure.

Curator

Guest curator of the project is John Milner, project leader at the Van Abbemuseum is Willem Jan Renders.

The Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven is one of Europe's leading museums for contemporary art. The museum's extensive international collection of around 2700 works of art includes key works by Lissitzky, Picasso, Kokoschka, Chagall, Beuys and McCarthy. The museum has an experimental approach towards the issues of art and society. Openness, hospitality and knowledge exchange are important to the Van Abbemuseum. We stimulate ourselves and our visitors to think about a range of subjects, like the role of the collection as a cultural 'memory' or the museum as a public place. International cooperation and exchange have made the Van Abbemuseum a place for creative cross-fertilisation. A source of surprise, inspiration and imagination.

Van Abbemuseum

Van Abbemuseum
Bilderdijklaan 10
Eindhoven

Opening hours

Tuesday - Sunday 11.00 - 17.00
Thursday 11.00 - 21.00

Admission

adults € 8,50
groups >15, visitors 65+ € 6
students / CJP card holders € 4
Thursday night 17.00 - 21.00 free admission

For more details visit
www.vanabbemuseum.nl

Note for Editors

More information and images can be downloaded directly at
www.vanabbemuseum.nl/en/press.

The press opening is at 11.00 a.m. on Thursday, 17 September 2009.

For further information, visual materials, interviews and/or to register to attend the press opening, please contact Claire Beke - Communicatie in Cultuur: tel. +31 (0)10 425 03 44 or e-mail: pressoffice@lissitzkyplus.com