

Constructivism

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Introduction Russian architecture since the eleventh century up to the early 20th century was predominantly religious. For many centuries, churches were the only buildings that were constructed out of stone. However, the Russian Revolution of 1917 and the influence of the Suprematism movement of 1915 brought about the birth of Constructivism, the modernistic architectural style of Russia from 1924-1932. The brief period that followed the 1917 Revolution marked the beginning of the influence of the avant-garde Constructivist movement in the structure and design of major buildings.

It enjoyed a short popularity until the late 1920s when it was repudiated by the more conservative Stalinist-era architecture. The principles of Constructivism theory come from three main art movements that evolved in Europe during the early part of the 20th century: Russian Suprematism, Dutch Des Stijl, or Neo Plasticism, and the Bauhaus in Germany . Historical Backdrop The Russian Revolution of 1917 In early 20th century Russia, particularly in 1917, there was a series of revolutions that eventually destroyed the autocracy of the Tsar.

This series of revolutions led by the workers of Russia under their leader Vladimir Lenin was known as the Russian Revolution. The February Revolution in March of 1917 focused on St. Petersburg. During this time, the Soviets, or workers' councils, delegated to the members of the Imperial Parliament the task of governing Russia and overthrowing Nicholas II, the Tsar during that time and the last of the Tsars. Meanwhile, the Soviets, led by the socialists or Bolsheviks, had the full allegiance of the lower-class

citizens and workers as well as the political left. The Bolsheviks then formed workers militias.

In the October Revolution that followed, the Bolshevik party under the command of their leader Vladimir Lenin, as well as the workers' councils, overthrew the Provisional Government in St. Petersburg. Eventually, the success of the revolution paved the way for the birth of the USSR. After this series of events, peasants took over the lands previously owned by the vassals and redistributed land. This also marked the beginning of communal existence especially among the working classes, which led to the building of several constructivist buildings to house the first communities and to promote the ideology of communism. The Suprematism Movement of 1915 Suprematism is the main ideology in art that inspired Constructivism, which is the predominant architectural style of Russia during the period from 1924 to 1932. Suprematism lasted from 1915 to 1935 and is regarded as the first systematic school of modernism based on purely abstract pictorial compositions and geometric figures. It is a Russian art movement which was originally founded in Moscow in 1913 by the Russian painter Kazimir Malevich.

Malevich advocated Suprematism as he believed that this is the perfect way “ to liberate art from the ballast of the representational world. ” He himself did this by producing art consisting of geometrical shapes flatly painted on the surface of the canvass. The goal of Suprematism is pure sensation and the pictorial space should be emptied of all symbolic content as in Surrealism. Malevich believed that art has to be “ decongested and cleared”

in order to show a new reality where the most important thing is thought as well as sensation.

Malevich's Suprematism was also heavily influenced by the then avant-garde movements in art such as Cubism and Futurism. Suprematism, considering that it was based on Malevich's spiritual beliefs, was regarded as non-objective and apolitical. Aside from its use of only geometric shapes as the ones demonstrated by constructivist forms of architecture, Suprematism also emphasized the use of a limited colour range, which explains the overall appearance of constructivist buildings.

The Beginnings and Golden Age of Constructivism The development of Suprematism led to the movement toward a non-objective art, or art without a subject, in architecture. During the early years of Constructivism, the Russian modernists or avant-garde started embracing Cubism and Futurism, which were two of the major sources of influence of Constructivism. Cubism was a 20th century modern movement popularized by Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque in France and other parts of Europe from 1907-1921.

Futurism, on the other hand, started in Italy in 1910 and from 1920-1940 was used in the construction of buildings despite the opposition of the fascist state which favoured classical Roman imperial patterns. In 1913-1914, the Russian and Soviet architect and painter Vladimir Tatlin used industrial materials to make and exhibit a number of relief constructions. He was inspired by Italian futurist Umberto Boccioni's dream of “plastic configurations in space” and Pablo Picasso's 3D collages, both of which he described by using the term Constructivism.

Vladimir Tatlin was indeed the progenitor of this post-Revolutionary movement in architecture. The year 1921 marked the appearance of the first Constructivist manifesto after the formation of the First Working Group of Constructivists in Moscow. The key artists were Vladimir Tatlin, Kasimir Malevich, Liubov Popova, Aleksandr Rodchenko, Vavara Stepanova, Vasily Kandinsky, Naum Gabo, Antoine Pevsner, El Lissitzky. Actual constructivist theory and design practice began in 1922 in conjunction with the formulation of Vesnin brothers of the plan for the Palace of Labor, which was presented during a competition in 1922.

However, actual building on a significant scale did not start until 1925 after the founding of the Union of Modern Architects, the official organization of the Russian Constructivist architects. By 1925, the first experimental office and residential buildings began their first appearance. Towards the end of 1925, the Constructivists of Russia formed their own organization as a response to the decision of the Rationalists to establish the Association of New Architects, or ASNOVA, two years earlier in 1923.

While the Rationalists and ASNOVA focused on their search for purely aesthetic abstract forms, the Constructivists and OSA (union of modern architecture) brought to life a novel, more practical architectural form, with reference to the purpose of the of the specific building, the materials used to construct it, its design and other conditions for production, and most of all the promotion of social development of Russia at that time. While the Rationalist emphasized the artistic or aesthetic side of architecture, the Constructivists favoured its functional aspect.

The period from 1927 to 1929 was considered the golden age of Russian avant-garde architecture. In these three years, a small group of Russian constructivist architects was able to build or plan the best-known buildings in the country. Among the structures built during this time were the Zuyev Club by Ilya Golosov, all the clubs by Konstantin Melnikov and his house, Lenin's Mausoleum and the Narkomzem building by Aleksey Shchusev, Narkomfin by Ginzburg and Milinis, the Barshch's and Sinyavsky's Planetarium, and Nikolaev's communal house for students. The Concept of Constructivism

Constructivism, or Constructivist Art, is a term used to describe a type of non-representational, or totally abstract, relief construction, sculpture, painting, and kinetics. Constructivist buildings are usually ordered and often minimal, spatial, geometric, architectonic and experimental with how industrial material is used. Furthermore, constructivism combined engineering and advanced technology with a dominant Communist social purpose. The movement produced several pioneering projects as well as prominent buildings and structures before falling out of favour during the early 1930s.

Early constructivist art and architecture, just like Communism, was idealistic and seeking a new order that dealt with various social and economic problems. The appearance of several constructivist buildings and monuments is characterized by an emphasis on geometrical shapes like rectangular solids and cylinders, often intersecting each other or demonstrating asymmetry. Limited colour range is another quality of constructivist buildings, with the choice of colour as flesh or white signifying simplicity in the communal society.

Red was also a very popular choice of colour for the buildings and monuments like Lenin's Mausoleum as this colour was known to symbolize Communism. Both the geometrical emphasis and the limits in colour are characteristics of Constructivist Architecture brought about by the influence of Suprematism, which was the most dominant art movement in Russia at that time. German “ Constructivism” or the Bauhaus Architecture, the German word “ Bauhaus” literally means “ House of Building” or “ Building School. ” It refers to a school in Germany famous for the style and design that it taught.

It is a form of modernist architecture that was founded by Walter Gropius and existed in Germany, some parts of Europe, the United States, and Israel from 1919 to 1933. The Bauhaus was an architectural ideology similar to Russian Constructivism and existed at the same time that it did. As Constructivism lost its favour because of Stalinist Neoclassicism, the Bauhaus gradually became inactive as the Nazi rose to power. Just like Constructivist structures, Bauhaus buildings usually possess a cubic design and favour right angles owing to its geometrical figure.

Nevertheless it may occasionally feature rounded corners as well as balconies. These buildings usually have an open floor plan and smooth facades. The Most Notable Constructivist Buildings The Rusakov Workers' Club. One of the most notable examples of constructivist architecture in Moscow is the Rusakov Workers' Club. It was designed by Konstantin Melnikov and was constructed from 1927 to 1928. On the outside, the club resembles a fan and in elevation, it is made up of a base and three cantilevered concrete areas for the seats.

If the seating areas are combined, the building can seat over 1, 000 people while each of these three cantilevered seating areas can be used as a separate auditorium. More conventional offices are found at the rear of the building. Moreover, the materials used in its construction are glass, concrete and brick. The constructivist identity of the building is expressed in its exterior, which the architect Melnikov himself described as a “ tensed muscle. ” On the outside, the three seating areas are seen as three large rectangular solids protruding from the walls of the building on the upper part.

Melnikov naturally applied his own values to its construction by setting the Rusakov Workers' Club, as well as other clubs he had designed, against the hostile city rather than belonging to it by employing sharply distinctive forms to make the structure appear individualist and unique against the general backdrop of urban buildings. Svoboda Factory Club, another constructivist building worth mentioning is the Svoboda Factory Club, or Maxim Gorky Palace of Culture. It was also Konstantin Melnikov who designed the building in 1927. It was completed two years later.

For the general design of the Svoboda Factory Club, a conventional rectangular masonry block was used as a replacement for the original plan of using a flat elliptical tube, thus giving its design a constructivist spirit. The staircase was not curved but built straight, leaving the central rostrum column as the only curvilinear element in the structure. However, although the central rostrum column balances the left and right halves of the building, these halves are not identical with the north side end block significantly higher than the opposite one.

This unique feature is a quality of the individualism of the constructivist movement. Nonetheless, the central rostrum hides such a discrepancy . Zuev Workers' Club, another prominent example of constructivist architecture is the Zuev Workers' Club in Moscow. The architect Ilya Golosov designed the structure in 1926 and it was finished after two years. The original function of the building was to house various facilities for the workers of Moscow.

The innovative and unique glazing treatment at its corner and the facade formed from the dramatic “ intersection of a cylindrical glazed staircase and a stack of rectangular floor planes” prove to be very photogenic and make the Zuev Workers' Club a symbol of Russian avant-garde architecture. These two unique qualities reflect a strong unique identity which is characteristic of Soviet Constructivism. The stack of rectangular floor planes has behind them a sequence of club rooms and open foyers that lead to a rectangular auditorium made up of 850 seats.

Golosov, like Melnikov, was an enthusiast not for the logics but for the dynamic forms Constructivist design methods. In the Zuev Workers' Club, this is evident in the immensely powerful drama of the cylinder intersecting the flat planes . Narkomzem, also known as People's Commissariat of Agriculture, Narkomzem was another noteworthy example of avant-garde architecture in early 20th century Russia. The building, which is now used today as a working ministry, was designed by Aleksey Shchusev and was finished in 1933.

The most striking constructivist feature of the building is its corner details where a rectangular plane intersects with the cylindrical edge. Aside from <https://assignbuster.com/constructivism-research-paper-samples/>

the corner details, the overall asymmetry and the ribbon window located on the top floor remain to be the most striking features of Narkomzem . Melnikov's House. The house of the architect Konstantin Melnikov, or simply known as Melnikov House, is one of the most notable examples of 20th century avant-garde architecture. It is located in Moscow and is located well away from the street.

Melnikov House is a building made up of a combination of both Futuristic and Classical designs consisting of two interlocking cylinders with the rear one noticeably taller than the front. The structure is also perforated with some sixty identical elongated hexagonal windows provided with Constructivist glazing bars. The asymmetry in the cylinders and the uniquely designed hexagons are testaments to Melnikov's commitment to Constructivism. The cylinders are made from stucco-covered bricks similar to those used in Russian churches and on the facade are written the words KONSTANTIN MELNIKOV ARKHITECTOR .

Narkomfin, another Russian building with constructivist design is the Narkomfin building. It was designed by the architects Ignaty Milinis and Moisei Ginzburg along with engineer Sergei Prokhorov. It was constructed from 1928 to 1930 for the purpose of providing apartments for the employees of the People's Commissariat of Finance, of the Narkomfin. The transitional, semi-communal apartment was supposed to introduce to the Soviet citizen the communal way of life and to introduce communism into the heart of domestic life and prepare the citizens to fully live a communal existence .

Narkomfin, for its constructivist elements, had a long elegant facade with several rows of horizontal windows. It was topped with the Commissar's penthouse making it look like and be called “ the ship. ” Upon its completion it turned out to be an ensemble composed of three buildings: the housing block, the communal block and a small laundry building. The Narkomfin has remained an icon of modernism in avant-garde architecture of Soviet Russia primarily because of these constructivist elements that make it stand out among the rest.

The Narkomfin building was also known as the most perfectly realized building out of all the communal buildings constructed during the Constructivist Era or in the utopian years of the early Soviet Union. It was also considered the prototype for the modern European apartment blocks and housing estates. Now, the Narkomfin remains as a pilgrimage sites for historians and architects from all over the world. The Communal House (1920-1930) of the Textile Institute, or the Communal House for Textile Institute Students, in Moscow is considered Ivan Nikolaev's masterpiece and is another noteworthy architectural work of the Soviet constructivist era.

Popularly called Nikolaev's House or The Hostel, the Communal House demonstrates the “ dom kommuna,” or the 2000 adult apprentices shared cabins along an eight-storey block extending for a length of 200 meters. There was a creative mix of dining rooms and recreational spaces in the low block. The Communal House was actually built for textile students to live and study in while adopting a strict military communal fashion that starts with a wake-up call, and proceeds with exercise, shower, and study.

The constructivist elements of the Communal House include half-round stair towers, the triangular staircase, and the vast rectangular volumes as well as the asymmetry demonstrated by the uneven intersections of the various planes in the facade of the building. The Barshch's and Sinyavsky's Planetarium, or the Moscow Planetarium, was established on November 5, 1929 and is considered at present a centre of natural sciences. The planetarium is principally involved in reading public lectures and implementing scientific and artistic programs in cosmonautics and astronomy. In the observatory of the planetarium, one can watch the sunspots, the Moon, the planets and many other heavenly bodies with the use of a telescope. The Modern State of the Planetarium M. O. Barshch and M. I. Sinyavsky were responsible for the design of the planetarium and commenced the construction on September 23, 1928, the day of the autumnal equinox. The planetarium was actually one of the largest projection domes for any planetarium in the world, which makes this unique feature one of its most prominent characteristics as a symbol of avant-garde Soviet architecture. However, its apex was only 4cm thick. Located in the former city of Leningrad, now St.

Petersburg, the Red Banner Textile Factory was partially designed by the first foreign architect asked to design in the USSR, Erich Mendelsohn, in 1925 to 1926, and later designed by E. A. Tretyakov, S. O. Ovsyannikov, and Hyppolit Pretraeus until its completion in 1937. The Red Banner Textile Factory was a dynamic, futuristic large factory and was a most notable example of Soviet Constructivist architecture. The Red Banner Factory resembled a ship with the top part of it jutting out of the planes. There is also

an asymmetry with the intersection of the cylindrical and rectangular sections of the building on the outside.

These two constructivist features of the factory give it its unique identity and make it stand out. Notable Architects of Russia from 1924-1932 The Russian constructivist designer Vladimir Tatlin was considered the progenitor of Soviet Constructivism because of his revolutionary exhibits of relief constructions from 1913 to 1914. He was also responsible for the appearance of the Constructivist Manifesto in 1921 which paved the way for the first construction of a plan for a constructivist building in 1922 and the actual establishment of constructivist office and residence buildings in 1925.

Tatlin trained at the Moscow School of Painting, Sculpture and Architecture as well as in the Penza Art School. It was after completing his formal studies that he joined a group of avant-garde painters and writers all over Russia. It was also during this period that he formulated several designs for a theater and participated in exhibitions. Konstantin Melnikov was one of the big names in Soviet constructivist architecture, being the architect behind the Rusakov Workers' Club, the Svoboda Factory Club and his own Melnikov House.

Melnikov apprenticed as an engineer after attending the Moscow School of Painting, Sculpture and Architecture. He studied architecture from 1912 to 1917 and it became his passion although he initially studied painting in 1905. As a romanticist and a supporter of Communism, Melnikov was an architect who had independence of mind and rejected the principle of “method” in design and instead focused on “intuition” as the most essential factor in expressing the social and symbolic meaning of an architectural form such as a building.

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In his works, Melnikov struggled to combine Classicism and Leftist Modernism and often designed his architectural masterpieces with explicit and symbolic historicism. A leader of Constructivism from 1925 to 1931, Ilya Golosov was the Russian architect responsible for the design of the Zuyev Workers' Club in Moscow and communal housing in Ivanovo. Just like Tatlin and Melnikov, Golosov studied at the Moscow School of Painting, Sculpture and Architecture. However, he also studied in the Stroganov School of Arts.

His main impression with the works of the Vesnin brothers made him join the constructivist organization, or the OSA Group in 1925, and from then on he started designing his masterpieces. However, although Golosov was a champion of Constructivist architecture, he regarded the architectural philosophy of Constructivism only as ideal for exterior decoration but not for wholesomeness in terms of functional style. These contrasting views of his regarding Constructivism eventually made him abandon the avant-garde form of architecture in 1932 and settled for neoclassical architecture in his works, hence from Soviet Constructivism to Soviet Realism.

Another name in the Soviet Constructivist architects hall of fame is Ivan Nikolaev. He was famous for the constructivist design and even the formulation of the rules and regulations of the Communal House of the Textile Institute built from 1929 to 1931. He devised a rather rigid and Communist procedure for the members of the training institute which was supposed to be followed through every single day: a wake-up call, exercise, shower and study. In addition Nikolaev was also famous for his modernist campus of the Moscow Power Engineering Institute.

He, however, abandoned his constructivist beliefs in order to adopt Stalinist architecture. Another prominent name in avant-garde Soviet architecture of early 20th century Russia was Aleksey Shchusev. Shchusev was responsible for the constructivist designs of the Kazan Railway Station, the Narkomzem, or Agriculture Ministry, building in Moscow, and most important of all, Lenin's Mausoleum on Red Square, which he designed only in a stunning period of three days. Another one of his constructivist designs was the Institute of Resorts in Sochi, which he designed from 1927 to 1931.

Shchusev was tasked to design many more buildings after 1932 and some say that he was even the originator of Gothic skyscrapers in Moscow. Shchusev studied at the Imperial Academy of Arts from 1891 to 1897 and his travels to North Africa and Central Asia from 1894 to 1899 may have somehow influenced his partial non-adherence to pure Constructivism. It is also worth mentioning that even before Shchusev designed buildings, he was already tasked to restore church and to design a cathedral during the first ten years of the 20th century.

His restoration of the St. Basil Church in Ukraine, his designs for the Trinity Cathedral in Pochayiv Lavra, and the Marfo-Mariinsky Convent in Moscow made him one of the best and most versatile architects of his time. The expressionist architect Erich Mendelsohn was a German Jewish architect and the first foreign architect who was allowed by the USSR to work for them. In 1926, he partially designed the Red Flag Textile Factory in St. Petersburg. The constructivist design of the exterior of the factory made it resemble a ship.

This particular masterpiece of Mendelsohn is similar to the Mossehaus, which he himself designed in Berlin. He also designed the rear view of the Einstein Tower in Potsdam and the Cohen House in London, all of which had designs similar to that of Soviet Constructivism. Mendelsohn studied architecture at the Technical University of Berlin and the Technical University of Munich, where he graduated cum laude in 1912. His initial work before he became an international architectural designer was as an independent architect in Munich.

One of the champions of Russian Constructivism, not necessarily for his actual works but for his theories, was the name Yakov Chernikhov. Perhaps Chernikhov's only actual architectural achievement was the Red Nail Maker's Factory, or Red Carnation Factory, built in St. Petersburg from 1930 to 1931. The rest of Chernikhov's fame is attributed to his written works. Chernikhov studied at the Odessa Art School where he taught drawing and sketching years later, and at the Academy of Arts at St. Petersburg where he graduated in 1925. He then joined the Constructivist movement and instead of concentrating on the actual practice of his profession, he wrote and published a series of books which showcased his constructivist architectural fantasies: *Fundamentals of Modern Architecture*, written from 1929 to 1930; *Construction of Architectural and Machine Forms*, written in 1931; and *Architectural Fantasies: 101 Compositions*, written in 1933. These three books did not only make him famous all over the world but also became a source of inspiration to many generations of architects. He had five more books published from 1934 to 1948. Decline of Constructivism

A competition for a grandiose project for the Palace of the Soviets was held in 1932. The constructivists joined the competition with their best entries. However, there was an ever-growing criticism of Modernism as that time, and this affected as well all the Soviet Constructivism. The winning entry was therefore not constructivist but an eclectic Stalinist architecture project by Boris Iofan. By the end of the 1920s, Constructivism was eventually replaced by Post constructivism, which featured buildings designed in a composite style and bore close resemblance to Neoclassicism.