

TEACHER EXHIBITION NOTES

IMAGINE MOSCOW

15 MARCH – 4 JUNE 2017

INTRODUCTION

Drawing on rarely seen material, Imagine Moscow presents an idealistic vision of the Soviet capital that was never realised. Large-scale architectural drawings are supported by artwork, propaganda and publications from the period. Taken together, these unbuilt projects suggest an alternative reality for the city, offering a unique insight into the culture of the time.

WHAT TO EXPECT

Each of the six projects presented in the exhibition introduce a theme relevant to life and ideology in the Soviet Union: collectivisation, urban planning, aviation, communication, industrialisation, communal living and recreation.

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE EXHIBITION

The exhibition is split into the following sections;

CLOUD IRON – COLONISING THE SKY

El Lissitzky's vision of the future is not too far off of the current truth. The unbuilt monolith of a building attempted to create a horizontal skyscraper that acted as its own mini city. Offices and living spaces all existed in harmony in El Lissitzky's attempt to address Moscow's growing population and also its feudal skyline that now seemed archaic, post revolution.

El Lissitzky's vision was to colonise the sky in what he dubbed a 'communist foundation of steel and concrete for the people of the earth'. This conquering of the skies and the recent growth in air travel can be seen in art of the period in a broad use of aeroplanes and aviation motifs and imagery. **To the defence of the USSR** by **Valentina Kulagina** (1931) makes use of the aeroplane silhouette to show Soviet dominance.

LENIN INSTITUTE – EDUCATING THE NEW MAN

Ivan Leonidov's Lenin Institute was designed to be 'the collective knowledge centre of the USSR'. The ambitious centre aimed to form a collective for all human knowledge. With a planned collection of five million books that would have sit alongside five large reading rooms, a planetarium, auditorium and scientific lecture theatres that would beam to the whole world via wireless transmitters. The centre was wildly ambitious and aimed to set Moscow as the centre of the world's knowledge.

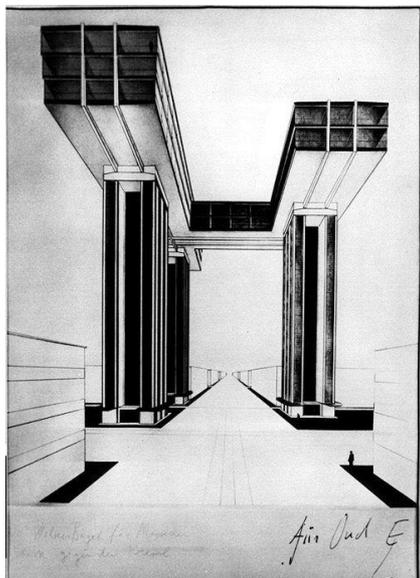


Image: Cloud Iron by El Lissitzky

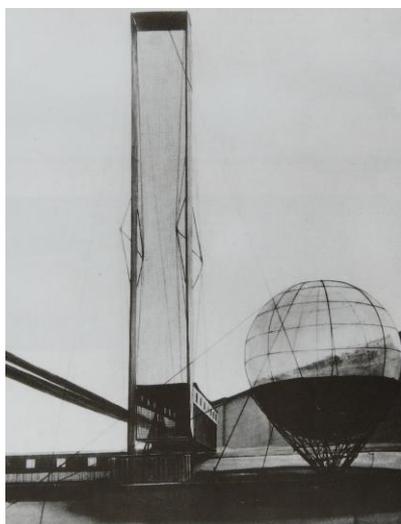


Image: A model of the Lenin Institute designed by Ivan Leonidov

With an emphasis on building knowledge after the Bolshevik need for might in order to bring around the Revolution. As such, many pieces of graphic design from this period focus on learning such as **‘Peasants and workers! You mastered the rifle, now master the quill. Fill schools and universities to capacity. Knowledge will be your victory.’** by an Unknown artist (1920s).

HEALTH FACTORY – THE BODY AS MACHINE

Nikolay Sokolov’s highly expressive graphic plan for the Health Factory proposed a retreat for tired Muscovites in the Matsesta district on the coast of the Black Sea. Like other Constructivists, Sokolov was interested in the idea of the ‘living cell’. The project consisted of individual capsules for isolated rest and a communal hall for eating and other collective activities. The common areas were designed to be efficient and mechanised, with conveyor belts to distribute food in order to prevent the queues that resulted from a conventional waiting system.

Sokolov’s proposal promoted productive rest as a key element in the new Soviet society. The idea of the holiday was presented as a means of restoring the productive capacities of the workers. As the USSR Conference on Workers’ Vacations declared: ‘Like a machine, a person needs repair and recuperation: socialist leisure restores the proletarian machine-body.’

A vacation was to be a relaxing experience but also an edifying one. To this end, health factories combined recreation, games, sports and other regulated activities different from the worker’s ordinary daily routine. Throughout the Soviet period, physical fitness was a national priority, and daily exercise was promoted by vigorous public health campaigns

Photos in this section of the exhibition entitled **‘Sports Parade on Red Square’** and **‘Free Aerobics’** show that even during exercise the aesthetic was considered.

COMMUNAL HOUSE – EMANCIPATING WOMEN

Nikolai Ladovsky was one of the first architects to address the idea of communal living. A lynchpin of the community, a key concept of the Soviet regime that was intended to revolutionize society by destroying the traditional family structure and transforming the role of women.

These themes of communal living and women in the workplace carried over into other aspects of Russian art including textiles such as those created by **Oskar Arjun** for **Trekhgornaya Manufacturing** between 1928-32.

COMMISARIAT OF HEAVY INDUSTRY

The monumental government building of the Commissariat of Heavy Industry would have occupied a site of just under ten acres directly



Image: Collective house by Nikolai Ladovsky



Image: Vesnin Brothers, Commissariat of Heavy Industry competition entry, 1934



Image: Palace of the Soviets

opposite the Lenin Mausoleum on Red Square. As part of Stalin's Greater Plan for Moscow, it would have required the demolition of a significant proportion of Moscow's old town. One of the largest of its kind, the two stage design competition received more than a hundred entries from Soviet architects.

While no winning design was selected, the entries include outstanding examples of a new type of representative architecture. Konstantin Melnikov's proposal set out to symbolise the achievements of Soviet industry. Its two forty-storey buildings, connected by an external escalator, were to be embellished with monumental sculptures representing the First and Second Five-year Plan.

PALACE OF THE SOVIETS

The Palace of the Soviets was conceived as the single most dramatic expression of Soviet power. Designed to accommodate Party Assemblies and mass gatherings, it would have been the tallest building in the world. It was designed for one of Moscow's most prominent sites, once occupied by the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour, the city's largest church which had been dynamited by Stalin.

With a height of 416 metres and topped with a 100-metre statue of Lenin, the building was designed to be taller than the Empire State Building in New York. Construction started in 1937 but was terminated by the German invasion in 1941. After the war, Stalin's successor, Nikita Khrushchev, had its foundations turned into an outdoor swimming pool. This too disappeared in 1994 to make way for the replica of the original cathedral that now stands on the site.

LENIN MAUSOLEUM

When Lenin died in 1924 Mayakovsky wrote: 'Lenin, even now, is more alive than the living.' The atheist leader of the Communist revolution became the object of a carefully orchestrated cult that took on an increasingly overt religious significance in its iconography.

Lenin was buried in Red Square, just outside the Kremlin, on three separate occasions. The first was in a temporary wooden mausoleum designed by Alexey Shchusev, which was built in less than a week. By the summer of 1924, Shchusev had drawn up plans for a more permanent wooden structure. But soon after it was built, a national competition for the design of a permanent mausoleum was announced. Numerous entries from professional architects as well as workers, clerks, teachers and pupils were received. However, again, it was Shchusev's design that was chosen to be realized.

The building was completed in 1930 and still stands on Red Square. Lenin's embalmed body lies in a glass sarcophagus designed by Melnikov and placed in the centre of a cube-shaped Memorial Hall with a stepped ceiling. The Mausoleum became the epicentre of the



Image: A cast of the index finger of the 100 meter high statue of Lenin that would have sat on top the Palace of the Soviets. Lenin would have been pointing towards his own Mausoleum.

Soviet Union, Lenin's monumental index finger was supposed to point it out from atop the Palace of the Soviets.

The sombre tone and affirmation of Lenin's leadership is carried over into graphic design of the period such as seen in **Gustav Klutsis's Monument to our Fallen Leaders**, 1924.

ACTIVITY SUGGESTIONS

There are many different aspects of the exhibition that can be explored – some sections allow students to interact with exhibits. Please look for interaction opportunities or ask staff if you are unsure of their location.

The use of sketchbooks and pencils is welcomed in the gallery, and will support all of the suggested activities listed below.

The following activity is a starting point for school and sixth form groups visiting the exhibition:

Design your own

Task A: Imagine Moscow looks at the unbuilt architecture just after the Russian Revolution. Get your students to research into unbuilt architecture in your local area. Get them to place the buildings onto a skyline and recreate the area as it could have been.

Task B: Pick one of the pieces in the Imagine Moscow gallery and try to repurpose it for your local area's skyline. What would be used for? Where would it be situated? Who would use it? Would you change the look of it to fit in with the architecture of your local area?

BEFORE YOUR VISIT

Prepare your students by showing them some of the video content of the exhibition from video sharing websites such as Youtube.

Aelita Queen of Mars – (1924) Director: Yakov Protazanov

Man with a Movie Camera – (1929) Director: Dziga Vertov

Destruction of Cathedral of Christ Saviour – (1931) Director: Unknown

The New Moscow – (1938) Director: Aleksandr Medvedkin

EXHIBITION GUIDANCE

Objects in the exhibition are on open display rather than in cases. Care should be taken when moving around the exhibition and most objects should not be touched. Any objects that can be touched will be clearly signed. We would be grateful if you could brief your students accordingly.

Depending on your group and your itinerary for the visit, we would recommend that you set aside approximately 40 minutes to explore this exhibition.

Photography and filming is strictly prohibited in the exhibition.

Please ensure that you read our school visit Terms and Conditions document before making your visit.

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