

## Engineer, Agitator, Constructor: The Artist Reinvented

Combining delicately hued watercolor with cut-and-pasted print reproductions, Grosz depicts his friend and fellow Dada artist John Heartfield as bald and grim-faced, with clenched fists and a machine for a heart. Grosz reimagines him not as an artist but as a “monteur,” one who fits machine parts—or, in Heartfield’s case, mechanically produced imagery.

Like broadsheets plastered on a public wall, cut-and-pasted papers—overlapping and colliding—infuse this artwork with the visual cacophony of the streets. Everything demands attention, from the images of Baader staring outward to the abundance of text, including headlines, journal articles, letters, and postcards. The accumulated elements form a rapid-fire portrait of contemporary politics in Germany. They also document Baader’s own attempts to plant distrust in the authority of the press—including his distribution of flyers announcing “Dadaists against Weimar” at a 1919 meeting of the German National Assembly. The work “advertises” Baader as a disruptor and cultural critic who radically defies all expectations of the artist’s role, domain, or means.

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Hailed as “the avant-garde of the creative Red Army,” the artists’ collective UNOVIS (Affirmers of the New Art)—based in Vitebsk (now in Belarus), west of Moscow—sought to transform geometric abstraction into a political weapon. In late spring of 1920, just as the Russian civil war took a decisive turn, Strzemiński and his partner, Katarzyna Kobro, established a UNOVIS branch in Smolensk and produced posters for the Russian telegraph agency (ROSTA). As individual authorship was subsumed in the aims of the collective, these posters were not signed. Hung throughout the city, first in windows, ROSTA posters were intended to agitate the public to support a Bolshevik (Red Army) victory.



Billboard displaying similar imagery above the door to the ROSTA telegraph office in Vitebsk or Smolensk, c. 1920

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A gargantuan figure marches triumphantly with a revolutionary flag, while frantic capitalists are squelched beneath his feet. Created under the auspices of the Russian Telegraph Agency (ROSTA), this poster commemorated the third anniversary of the Bolshevik uprising in 1917. Rapidly produced via stencil, linocut, or lithograph and paired with up-to-the-minute texts informed by telegrams, “ROSTA windows” like this one—so called because the posters were originally displayed in shop windows—embraced simple graphics, bold colors, and colloquial text to accommodate split-second legibility and the quick production schedule required by the agency’s constant beat of news.

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In 1919, Klutsis joined both the Communist party and UNOVIS (Affirmers of the New Art), a collective of artists who sought to use abstraction for agitational purposes. Klutsis's photomontage embodies these dual commitments. While some of the photographic elements have deteriorated or been lost, the combination of approaches—simplified geometries exemplified by the red square and cut-and-pasted photographs calling out the ambitions of the new Soviet order—suggests the work may have been created in two stages: begun in the spirit of UNOVIS and reworked after Vladimir Lenin's death in January 1924. The printed text refers to Lenin's famous slogan of 1920, "Communism = Soviet power plus the electrification of the entire country."



Archival photograph of Klutsis's photomontage *Electrification of the Entire Country* with lost elements, 1920. Courtesy Latvian National Museum of Art, Riga. Inv. no. VMM Z-8750/15. © 2020 Estate of Gustav Klutsis/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

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Popova layered geometric shapes so that they appear to twist and jostle, creating a sense of energy. Her model of abstraction is implied by her use of the term “architectonic.” She treated planes architecturally, as solid material entities, producing a composition focused on the interrelationships between individual parts.

With its multiple lenses—glasses and magnifying loupe—and pocket watch, this self-portrait represents a new kind of artist, one with expanded vision and, with his timepiece at the ready, responsive to the dynamism and speed of modern life. While Schuitema’s hands dominate the composition, their role in creating is challenged by the printed matter he offers up: machine-made and reproducible, like this photograph itself.

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Popova worked as a costume and set designer for Vsevolod Meyerhold's theater, which she joined in 1922, just before the premiere of the play *The Magnanimous Cuckold*. Following Meyerhold's costuming principles for the production—standardized blue workers' clothing supplemented with identifying features—she created prototypes that suited multiple narratives. Marking a transition from aesthetic to utilitarian goals, this drawing fuses Suprematist forms and functionalist logic to create a model for the theater of the future.



The Mayor (Aleksei Temerin), Guards, and Peasant Women from Vsevolod Meyerhold's production of Fernand Crommelynck's *Magnanimous Cuckold*, Zon Theater, Moscow, 1922. Photograph by Ya. M. Tolchan. Image courtesy A. A. Bakhrushin State Central Theatre Museum, Moscow

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Commissioned by the German Communist Party (KPD) to create a campaign poster for the 1928 elections, Heartfield applied the visual language of advertising to ideological persuasion, creating a gripping composition that reportedly attracted throngs of viewers wherever it was posted. The clenched fist was a well-known symbol of German socialism, but Heartfield's version of the hand, with its widespread fingers, was innovative for displaying the calluses and grime that signaled the subject's identity as a manual worker (in search of the perfect subject, he photographed the hands of hundreds of factory laborers as they left work). Printed in a large edition and in different formats, the image became so iconic that German KPD members are said to have greeted each other with this gesture.

Höch layers scraps of found paper into a rectilinear grid, centered around the word "dada," which dynamically slices into the composition. This work connects her Dadaist practice—characterized by an embrace of the fragmentation and instability of contemporary life—to her Constructivist ambition to create stable structures that would serve as a template for a more rational, egalitarian future society.

Domela-Nieuwenhuis designed the cover of this catalogue, which shows hands poised to cut a photograph of a building, for the first exhibition to summarize developments in photomontage. The medium, he wrote, reflected our “living in an age of extreme precision and maximum contrasts.” Foregrounding process and materials—scissors, a compass, a triangle—the design also advertises the medium’s range of visual effects, from the combination of disparate subjects to dramatic shifts in scale, all framed within a dynamic triangle. Domela-Nieuwenhuis was also a co-organizer of the exhibition, in which works were organized according to three categories: free design, commercial advertising, and political propaganda.

This work offers a view into Stepanova’s process of constructing photomontage for reproduction in print. She cut the figure of a Red Army soldier from a photograph taken by Boris Ignatovich, then pasted it onto a vibrant red background. Rotating the figure to fill the page, Stepanova emphasized the camera’s dramatic viewpoint and created an authoritative image of Soviet militarism, which she then multiplied in the endpapers of a posthumous publication of Vladimir Mayakovsky’s civil war posters. In this and other works, Stepanova set aside painting in favor of, as she put it, “conscious action,” forms of art that engaged mass audiences.



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Soon after designing this poster advertising the municipal pools in his home city of Augsburg, Germany, Feist was banned from those same pools because he was Jewish. “The poster actually graced the outdoors of my hometown for quite a few years, ironically displaying my total image deep into the period when people of my blood were not allowed into the public swimming pools,” he recalled. Erich Comeriner, his peer at the Bauhaus school of art and design, took the photograph of Feist on a lawn in the pose of a swimmer (in the case nearby); Feist then cut out his own figure and combined it with bold graphics.

In 1929, no skyscrapers had yet been built in the Soviet Union. Nevertheless, Kulagina created an aspirational vision of Soviet architecture. With “We are building” spanning the cityscape, this maquette promoted Stalin’s First Five-Year Plan (1928–32), which supported public infrastructure projects as part of a program to increase the nation’s industrial productivity. Kulagina combined printed images of American architecture—such as the Detroit skyscraper at right—with hand-drawn elements, and inserted sandpaper to suggest the texture of concrete. Singled out for its originality at her art-school thesis exhibition, this design was reproduced by the state publishing house IZOGIZ as a postcard, and variants of the image circulated as a poster and a magazine cover.

The Red Army Theater performed its plays glorifying the Soviet military in Moscow, where it was based, and on tours across the country. Celebrating the traveling aspect of the theater, Telingater's design for a fantastical decorated truck advertises two plays: *The Destruction of the Squadron* and *The Aviatrices*. The collaged elements recall Soviet agitational vehicles, such as floats, trains, trams (an example appears below), which were used in mass festivals to activate the postrevolutionary populace, and also served as mechanisms for distributing newspapers to villages isolated from central media.



Tram adorned with agitational slogans on Moscow's Taganka Square, 1930. Courtesy Cambridge University Library

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This poster advertises a Moscow exhibition of anti-imperialist art from around the globe. In accordance with Soviet policy, which sought to forge an alliance between socialism and the struggle against European colonial domination in Africa and Asia, Klutskis presents two Soviet soldiers in the company of three men of color. Though the image emphasizes solidarity among comrades challenging imperialist violence, it is the white periscope operator who leads, while the surrounding figures are more passive.

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These abstract prints showcase Peri's explorations of the relationship between geometric form, color, and space. Peri made these works during his exile in Berlin, where he had relocated to escape the repression of leftist artists and intellectuals following the collapse of the short-lived Hungarian Soviet Republic in 1919. In Berlin, Peri played a key role in the artistic circle around Herwarth Walden's journal and gallery *Der Sturm*, which published his linoleum cuts as a portfolio.

This cover design embodies the spirit of *Képarchitektúra*, or "picture architecture," a term coined in 1921 by the journal's editor, Lajos Kassák. Trained as an architect, Molnár found refuge at the Weimar Bauhaus after fleeing persecution in Hungary. Here, he deploys letterforms as structures in space and evokes the iconography of a revolutionary flag unfurled behind a black mast, which had appeared on posters in the streets of Budapest during the Communist revolution of 1919.

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An innovator who worked in art, design, and architecture, Lissitzky saw publishing as key to shaping a universal language for an increasingly connected and modernized world. After moving to Berlin in 1921 to serve as a cultural representative of the Soviet Union, Lissitzky cofounded the multilingual journal *Veshch-Gegenstand-Objekt* with writer Ilya Ehrenburg. Lissitzky went on to edit, design, and contribute to numerous publications produced in Europe, Russia, and even New York. Common to these efforts was an investigation of the architecture of page and sequence—what he called the “book space”—and the correspondence between “printing mechanics” and “the tensions and pressures of content.”

Transforming the ground plan for Dammerstock, a space-efficient housing development in Karlsruhe, Germany, into a striking abstract motif, Schwitters created an economical and eye-catching logo in line with the functionalist spirit of the complex. Linking name to terrain, a bold “d” reaches above the letters to the right and forms a compositional pivot between the title and the flat, near-trapezoidal shape. Tasked with designing all publicity materials for the exhibition that accompanied Dammerstock’s opening, Schwitters created a logo that would stand out against any color, from the sunset hues of the poster to the white of the estate’s map.

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“We have a wealth of typefaces, but they are all historic, not one is systematic,” wrote Schwitters, describing his ambition to create a more rational alternative. This poster for a festival day sponsored by Frankfurt am Main’s premier bicycle and automobile manufacturer, Opel, employs a variation of Schwitters’s “Systemschrift,” a standardized, universal script, which he developed in the late 1920s in order to visually represent vocal sounds. Combining hard-edged consonants with rounded vowels, Schwitters created quickly legible words, which converge on the visually arresting form of an outsize “O” in the lower right corner. In the end, his universal typeface was a theoretical exercise—it appeared in only a few advertisements.

Schwitters conceived his journal *Merz* as an international platform for experimentation with typography, graphic arts, and poetry, reinventing the style and layout with each issue, occasionally even changing the format from page to page and paragraph to paragraph. Schwitters also pushed the limits of graphic design, incorporating found elements like pointing fingers and bold arrows, and using dynamic typography to activate the reading experience and highlight the printing process. Collaborating on the magazine’s design with artists such as Hans Arp, Theo van Doesburg, El Lissitzky, and Kate Steinetz, Schwitters created a space for collective participation and international connection.

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Here, Munari used photomontage to advertise the projected role of industry in Italy's imperial expansion. In the 1930s, Munari made his living through commercial projects, some of which appeared in platforms associated with the fascist regime. Published in a 1937 issue of *The Wing of Italy*, a newspaper established by Benito Mussolini, this maquette advertises the private companies Aeroplani Caproni, Reggiane, and Isotta Fraschini as driving forces of Italy's national defense, agriculture, milling, and transportation industries. Munari associates the power of new technology with fascism by composing an abstracted fasces—a bundle of rods with a protruding axe that was an emblem of Mussolini's government—with the stacked photographs of machinery at right and the airplane engine at center.

Connecting two spaces—a kitchen where women assess the quality of a (male) chef's soup and a communal dining room—Bri-Bein represents both the contributions of women workers and the introduction of a new Soviet service, the public canteen enabling them to enter the workforce. Though some artists used photomontage, Bri-Bein drew her design with nearly photographic precision. This work dates to the year that the state centralized poster production and established groups of workers to review posters' efficacy. One reviewer criticized this work for neglecting "elementary rules of hygiene" by showing a worker tasting the food directly from the cooking pot.

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This advertising flyer for saws, drills, and files (*zagen, boren, vijlen*) uses readymade printing elements to evoke the function of each tool: jagged edges for the saw, graduated circles for the drill, and a field of diamonds for the file. Combining overlapping planes, lively diagonals, and typographic elements of varying thickness, Zwart captured the movements and precision of the equipment. A self-described “typotekt”—a melding of typographer and architect (the latter was his professional training)—Zwart embraced the visual vocabulary of the type shop, including letters, ornaments, and blank spacing material, to reconceive design as an act of construction.

Raised in a Jewish family engaged with the Social Democratic Workers' Party, Cohen worked as a graphic designer in the party's publishing company in the early 1920s. Designing stationery, course participation certificates, book covers, and more, Cohen crafted a modern visual identity for every aspect of the party's affiliated youth group, of which she had been a member. After gaining commissions in the 1930s from a range of public and private clients, she continued to work (illegally) as a graphic designer during the Nazi occupation of the Netherlands. Upon her arrest in 1943, she took her own life.



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Marketed as a “second home,” a “church of a new cult,” and “life itself,” workers’ clubs were introduced in the 1920s as spaces for leisure and edification, meant to shape citizens as participants in proletarian, collective culture. Typically attached to factories and businesses, the clubs provided a range of services, including literacy instruction, agitational theater, and spaces to rest and eat. Semenova’s designs anticipated changing needs, offering flexible areas filled with modular and portable furnishings made from affordable materials. These designs were not meant to be constructed as is; instead, Semenova published them in magazines as models for those building new communal spaces.

Linking innovative technologies and athleticism, this photomontage celebrates the dynamism of modern life as it was embodied in newly developed sports, such as automobile and airplane racing, waterskiing, cycling, and skydiving. Brandt, who is best known for her leadership (after 1928) of the male-dominated Bauhaus metal workshop, here departed from her sleek, functional metal designs (on view nearby). While sojourning in Paris, Brandt experimented with cutting and pasting images from magazines and journals to further her investigations in design and composition, and perhaps also to reflect on her new surroundings (the Eiffel Tower is visible in the background).

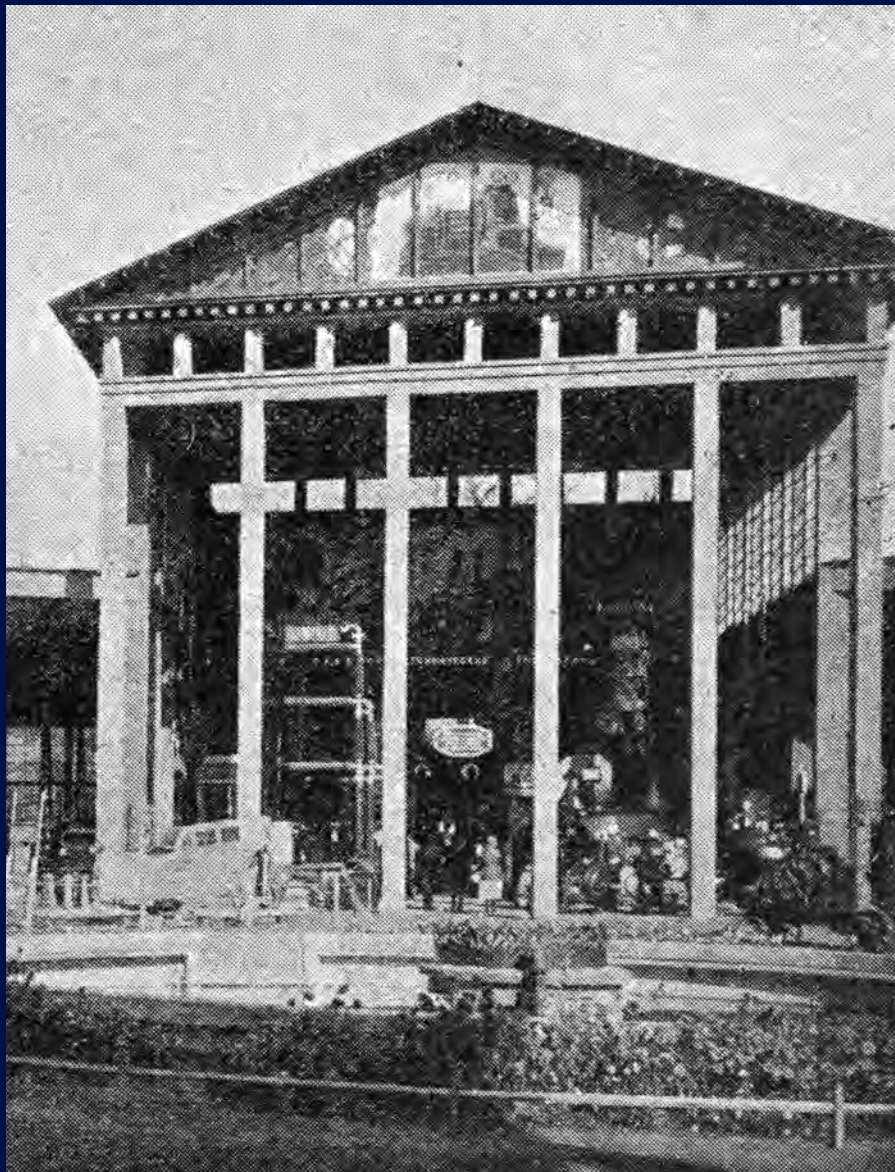
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Proposing a new chess set for the modern age, Bauhaus wood workshop master Josef Hartwig reduced individual chess pieces to elemental geometric forms based on their function and movements. While still a Bauhaus student, Schmidt designed promotional materials and the cardboard packaging for Hartwig's chess set, including this unrealized advertisement. By picturing the board from above, Schmidt seems to invite us to imagine how the abstract forms of the pieces, based on utility rather than traditional hierarchies, might work both within the chess game and as a model for a more rational, egalitarian social order.

An aspirational image of Moscow, Deineka's poster records unrealized experiments in urban planning, aimed at modernizing Moscow. The work's title parades through the composition, agitating the streets as it divides the place of production—the factory on the left—from the apartment blocks and athletic field on the right. In this proposal for “a model socialist city,” people travel from work, by foot, streetcar, and bus, to head home or to the workers' club (at center left). Deineka's aerial perspective attests to Moscow's changing landscape, calling to mind views from the recently built Shukhov radio tower and the burgeoning enthusiasm for aeronautics that inspired many artists in the period to represent cities from above.

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A choreography of cogwheels, cranes, pulleys, and other machinery, the mural for the back wall of the Mechanical Engineering Pavilion of the 1923 All-Russian Exhibition of Agriculture and Home Industries was commissioned to energize its display of Soviet industry. Having trained as an easel painter and worked as a set designer, Exter here deployed these skills to emphasize the exhibition's ambitions to shape the economic and cultural identity of the newly formed Soviet Union. Although the designs are drawn, she worked in the spirit of collage to juxtapose textured renderings of wood (considered a traditional material) with the modern steel surfaces of machines, stressing the move from handicraft to industry.



Exhibition pavilion with Exter's mural within. Detail from Moisei Ginzburg's *Style and Epoch: Problems of Contemporary Architecture*, 1924. Courtesy General Research Division, The New York Public Library

Looking to explore the new field of advertising architecture, Bayer created this exhibition stand for an imagined electrical company. Bands of pure color and illuminated text rotate around an enormous contraption resembling a transmission tower. Referring to the features of Soviet propaganda kiosks—lightweight portable structures adorned with bold graphics to disseminate political messages—Bayer demonstrates how electrical lighting could itself sell electricity. To emphasize the tower's height, Bayer inserted a miniscule figure near its base. The American flags are, perhaps, a nod to Germany's embrace of capitalism and reliance on American loans after the First World War.

Two pillars resembling the sprocketlike rolls that move photographic negative film through a camera mark the entrance to this proposed exhibition route, inviting viewers to read its spiraling walls as an unravelling filmstrip, each "frame" to be encountered in sequence. While the imagery on display—cut and pasted from mass media—relates to themes of travel and circulation, this exhibition format combines advertising and architecture to form an apparatus of persuasion—there is only one path in and out—that could host displays on any number of subjects for multiple clients.

Designed and executed on the occasion of the 1923 Bauhaus Exhibition, Bayer's three-part mural filled one wall on each floor of a three-story staircase in the school's main Weimar building. As a student in the wall painting workshop, Bayer sought to use color as a tool for transforming space. This mural visually connected the floors and provided the visitor with a route to the administrative offices, integrating art and architecture and animating the experience of moving through space with color and form. The triangle, square, and circle—one for each landing space—announce the school's commitment to geometric abstraction.



The first, second, and third floors of the Weimar Bauhaus stairwell with Bayer's mural for the 1923 Bauhaus Exhibition installed. Courtesy Bauhaus-Archiv Berlin. © 2020 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn. Photographs by Lucia Moholy. © 2020 Lucia Moholy Estate/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn

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A graphic designer, architect, theorist, filmmaker, developer of mass festivals and theater, and cofounder of the Working Group of Constructivists, Gan was primarily a political organizer. He shaped the Constructivist movement through his conviction that in a society where mass production supplanted unique creations, construction of a work involved building broad public desire for it. Gan designed this issue of *Sovremenniaia arkhitektura* (Contemporary architecture), which features his proposal for a rural kiosk for education and enlightenment, where such magazines could be purchased. The kiosk and the magazine were conceived as partners, each creating an audience for the other.

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Part of a circle of socially engaged artists, architects, and filmmakers in Frankfurt, Bergmann-Michel became interested in cinema as an organizer of film programs, and then turned to documentary as part of efforts to better the lives of the city's citizens, focusing on housing, hunger, and, here, the rise of fascism. She was versed in the language of motion pictures and spoke of the importance of point of view and montage, and was committed to filming what was around her, an approach that made local authorities suspicious during the shooting of this film. As a result, it was never completed and remained a fragment.

Beginning in 1930, Heartfield contributed photomontages to the German periodical *Arbeiter-Illustrierte-Zeitung* (Workers' illustrated newspaper) that satirized Nazis' Aryan doctrines: anti-Semitism, racism, nationalism. Here he ascribes them to a bizarre academic—notice the swastikas in his glasses—who claims that “corns on the feet of pure Germans” provide special powers. In another work nearby, Heartfield parodies the Nazi slogan “Loyalty for loyalty” by showing Hitler as a faithful victim of his own firing squad.