



Art and Politics: Syllabus

Instructor: Anna Wexler Katsnelson

FAH 0092/0192 ■ Spring 2010

■ Aldekman 13 ■ Tues / Thurs 4:30 - 5:45

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Office hours: Tues 5:45-6:45 & by appointment

Course Description: This course will investigate the complex inter-relationships between politics, ideology and aesthetics, and consider whether it is only governments and the policies they make that have the power to coerce artistic production, or whether artists can shape politics and ideology as well. In short: What does it mean for art to be political? The primary historical focus will be on Russian art before, during, and after the Bolshevik revolution, but comparative geo-historical cases will also be considered.

Assignments:

Reading: Divided between primary sources and criticism. Readings vary in volume.

Required Reading:

- Gray, Camilla, *The Russian Experiment in Art*
- Kiaer, Christina, *Imagine No Possessions*
- Widdis, Emma, *Visions of a New Land*
- Articles will be emailed to all students in class! Make sure that I have your email on file!!

Optional Reading:

- Acton, Edward, *Russia: the Tsarist and Soviet Legacy*. Recommended for students with little or no knowledge in Soviet history.

Short Paper: A formal analysis of an artwork. Due Feb. 11. Up to 6 pages. Format: double spaced, either Times New Roman (12) or Currier New (10), Margins: Left, Right (1.25"); Top, Bottom (1").

Midterm Exam: Identification of key images from class discussions and one essay. March 9.

Final Exam: A take-home exam. Identification of key terms from readings and class discussions, and two essays. Time to be announced. Format: double spaced, either Times New Roman (12) or Currier New (10), Margins: Left, Right (1.25"); Top, Bottom (1"). Hand-written exams will not be read.

Grading:

■	Short Paper	20%
■	Midterm Exam	25%
■	Final Exam	30%
■	Class Participation	25%

Jan 26: Introduction




Concepts: Revolution, Interdisciplinarity, Engaged Art, Avant-Garde

HANDOUT: Peter Bürger "The Theory of the Avant-Garde"; Louis Althusser "Ideology and the State" ; Russia's *Time Frame*

Jan 28: 19th c. Realism



- Camilla Gray, "Russian Experiment in Art", Chapters 1,2
- T.J. Clark, "Olympia's Choice" 

Feb 2: East vs. West & the Revival of Folklore




- Camilla Gray, "Russian Experiment in Art", Chapter 3
- from John Bowlt, "Russian Art of the Avant-Garde": Aleksandr Benois "History of Russian Painting," Aleksandr Shevchenko, "Neoprimitivism" 

HANDOUT: Hal Foster, "The Primitive Unconscious of Modern Art"




Feb 4: Jewish Renaissance



- Ziva Amishai-Maisels "The Jewish Awakening" 

Feb 9: Alogism





- Camilla Gray, "Russian Experiment in Art", Chapter 4
- Victor Shklovsky, "Art as Technique" 
- Vladimir Mayakovsky et al., "A Slap in the Face of Public Taste" 
- Velimir Khlebnikov et al., "The Word as Such" 

HANDOUT : Vladimir Mayakovsky, "To the Shop Signs"

Feb 11-16: Futurism



- Camilla Gray, "Russian Experiment in Art", Chapter 5
 - Aleksei Kruchenykh et al. "Victory Over the Sun" 
 - Natan Altman "Futurism" 
- Class screening of *Victory Over the Sun*

HANDOUT :F. T. Marinetti, "The Founding Manifesto of Futurism"

Feb 11: Short Paper Due

Feb 23: Vladimir Tatlin & Culture of Materials



- Camilla Gray, "Russian Experiment in Art", Chapter 6
- John Elderfield, "The Line of Free Men" ✉

Feb 25: Kazimir Malevich & Culture of No-Materials



- Camilla Gray, "Russian Experiment in Art", Chapter 7
- Aleksandra Shatskikh, "UNOVIS" ✉
- Kazimir Malevich, "From Cubism and Futurism to Suprematism" (excerpts) ✉

HANDOUT: El Lissitzky "Nonobjective Art"

March 2: Gender



- Alexandra Kollontai, "Theses on Communist Morality in the Sphere of Marital Relations" ✉
- Natalia Goncharova, "Open Letter" ✉

Class screening: *Bed & Sofa* (1927) excerpts, Abram Romm

HANDOUT: Anna Akhmatova, "I taught women how to speak"

March 4-9: Montage



- Emma Widdis, "Visions of a New Land"
- Sergei Eisenstein, "A Dialectic Approach to Film Form", "The Method of Making a Workers Film" "The Problem of the Materialist Approach to Form" ✉

Screening: *Battleship Potemkin* (1925), by Sergei Eisenstein

HANDOUT: Anatolii Lunacharsky "Revolution and Art"

MARCH 11: MIDTERM EXAM

March 16: Constructivism I



- Camilla Gray, "Russian Experiment in Art", Chapter 8
- Maria Gough, "Faktura" ✉
- Alexei Gastev, "We Grow out of Iron" ✉

HANDOUT: Boris Arvatov, "The Proletariat and Leftist Art"

March 18: Photomontage



- Christina Kiaer, "Imagine No Possessions"
- Leah Dickerman, "The Fact and the Photograph" ✉

HANDOUT: Aleksandr Rodchenko, "Against the Synthetic Portrait"

Spring Break!!!!

March 30–April 1: Fact or Fiction



- Dziga Vertov, "Kino-Eye"
- Walter Benjamin, "The Author as Producer"
- Emma Widdis, "Visions of a New Land"

Screening: *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929), by Dziga Vertov

April 6: Gender II



- Richard Stites, excerpt from "The Women's Liberation Movement in Russia"
- Christina Kiaer, "Imagine No Possessions"

April 8-13: Socialist realism I: Painting & Photography



- Katerina Clark, "The Soviet Novel"
- Benjamin Buchloh, "From Faktura to Factography"
- Leah Dickerman, "Camera Obscura: Socialist Realism in the Shadow of Photography"

HANDOUT: Sergei Tretiakov, "Photo-observation"

April 15-20: Socialist realism II: Film



- Clement Greenberg, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch"
- Emma Widdis, "Visions of a New Land"

Screening: *Circus* (1936), by Grigori Aleksandrov

HANDOUT: Milan Kundera, "The Book of Laughter and Forgetting"

April 22: Socialist realism III : Architecture



- Vladimir Paperny "Culture Two"

April 27-29: Historiography – Looking backwards



- Boris Groys, "The Birth of Socialist Realism from the Spirit of the Russian Avant-Garde"
- Paul Wood, "The Politics of the Avant-Garde"

HANDOUT: Slavoj Zizek, "Did Somebody Say Totalitarianism"

Some Online Resources:

- * Bibliography of Russian Avant-Garde Art: <http://www.a-art.com/avantgarde/biblio.html>
- * Russian Art: <http://www.usc.edu/dept/LAS/IMRC/russianart/index.html>
- * Bibliography of Russian & Soviet Cinema: http://www.pitt.edu/~slavic/video/cinema_biblio.html
- * Russian Avant-Garde Posters (in Russian/German): <http://www.russianposter.ru/>

