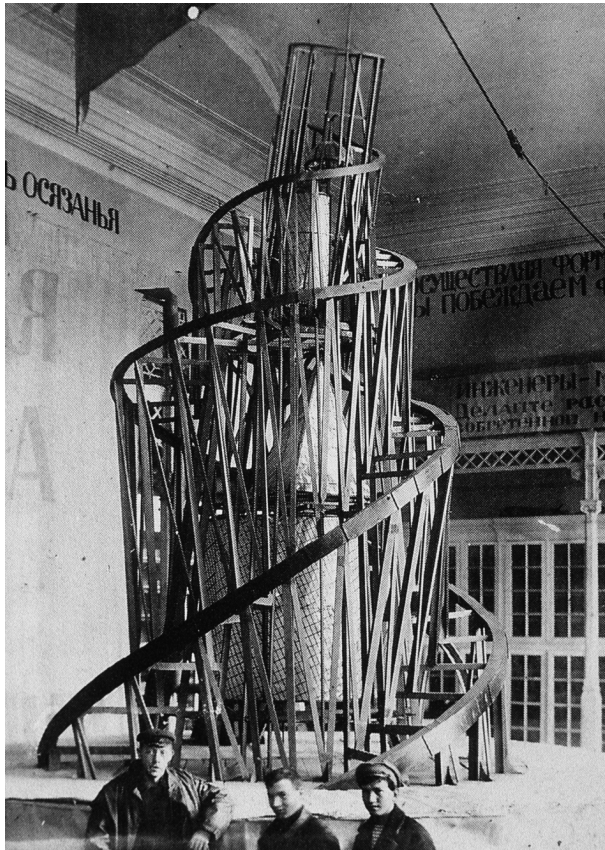


MARIA GOUGH

Despite the fact that it was never realized at full scale, Vladimir Tatlin's long-lost model for his *Monument to the Third International* (1920) remains to this day the most widely known work of the Soviet avant-garde. A visionary proposal for a four-hundred-meter tower in iron and glass conceived at the height of the Russian Civil War, the monument was to house the headquarters of the Third International, or Comintern, the international organization of Communist, socialist, and other left-wing parties and workers' organizations founded in Moscow in the wake of the October Revolution with the objective of fomenting revolutionary agitation abroad. Constructed in his spacious Petrograd studio, which was once the mosaics workshop of the imperial Academy of Art, Tatlin's approximately 1:80 scale model comprises a skeletal wooden armature of two upward-moving spirals and a massive diagonal girder, within which are stacked four revolving geometrical volumes made out of paper, these last set in motion by means of a rotary crank located underneath the display platform. In the proposed monument-building, these volumes were to contain the Comintern's legislature, executive branch, press bureau, and radio station. According to the later recollection of Tevel' Schapiro, who assisted Tatlin in his construction of the model, two large arch spans at ground level were designed so that the tower could straddle the banks of the river Neva in Petrograd, the birthplace of the 1917 revolutions.

Lost since the mid-1920s, Tatlin's original model has been reconstructed several times at the behest of exhibition curators. The first such undertaking was by Ulf Linde and Per Olof Ultvedt for Pontus Hulten at the Moderna Museet in Stockholm in the late '60s. Some two decades later, a team led by Dmitrii Dimakov at the Penza Art School—where Tatlin had once been a student—produced a reconstruction for Anatolii Strigalev and Jürgen Harten's traveling retrospective of the artist's work in 1993–94; this version is now on permanent view at the State

\* Earlier versions of this essay were presented in 2012–13 at the Museum Tinguely, Northwestern University, Harvard University, and the annual conference of the College Art Association—my warm thanks to the respective conveners of those events: Roland Wetzels, Anna Szech, Gian Casper Bott, Christina Kiaer, Robert Bird, Juliet Koss, Claire Grace, and Kevin Lotery. A short excerpt from an earlier draft appeared without illustrations in *Tatlin: Neue Kunst für eine neue Welt: Internationales Symposium*, ed. Museum Tinguely (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2013), pp. 42–47.



*Vladimir Tatlin and assistants with the model for Monument to the Third International. Petrograd. 1920.*

Tret'iakov Gallery in Moscow. Over the years there have been several others.<sup>1</sup> Artists, too, have played a role in shoring up the iconic status of Tatlin's monument project, his original model serving as a generous interlocutor for Dan Flavin and Paul Thek in the '60s and '70s, respectively. Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, Ai Weiwei, Michael Rakowitz, Michel Aubry, Kcho [Alexis Leyva Machado], Yuri Avvakumov, and Aristarkh Chernyshev and Aleksei Shulgin, among numerous others, have eulogized, paraphrased, ironized, and otherwise recycled it.<sup>2</sup> In the '90s, architect Takehiko Nagakura used digital technology to afford it, virtually speaking, full scale and a physical site. Over the course of some five decades, meanwhile, art historians and critics have repeatedly analyzed the monument's form, construction, utopianism, Futurism, Constructivism, feasibility, ideology, symbology, and political significance.<sup>3</sup>

There is at least one aspect of Tatlin's original model that has never been researched, however, and that is its exhibition in two large-scale trade fairs held in Moscow in 1920 and 1921, one state-sponsored, the other organized by the Comintern itself. Drawing upon reports published in daily newspapers at the time, the present essay offers a preliminary account of the model's exhibition value both as a platform for discussion and as an icon of Communist spectacle, my ultimate objective being to suggest its role and significance in the formation of what would soon become a new medium for the Russian avant-garde, most notably in the hands of El Lissitzky: namely, the Soviet trade fair. Though the involvement of progressive artists in this mode of exhibition practice was novel in the early '20s, it is worth remembering that the trade fair itself had been around for almost a millennium. A showcase for the promotion of goods manufactured under capitalist relations of production, its earliest manifestations date to the rise of mercantile capitalism, while the Industrial Revolution subsequently spurred its exponential proliferation. In the wake of October, however, the Soviet administration sought to reimagine the trade fair for Communist purposes.

Before entering into my main subject here, some introductory words about Tatlin's initial conceptualization of the project and his construction of the model

1. On the various reconstructions see, inter alia, Troels Andersen, *Vladimir Tatlin* (Stockholm: Moderna Museet, 1968); Dimitri Dimakov, "Nasha prodelannaia rabota: Rekonstruktsiia modeli Pamiatnika III Internationala," in *Vladimir Tatlin, Retrospektive*, ed. Anatolii Strigalev and Jürgen Harten (Cologne: DuMont, 1993), pp. 53–60; Norbert Lynton, *Tatlin's Tower: Monument to Revolution* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), p. 236, n. 53; and Nathalie Leleu, "Let Us Place the Eye Under the Control of Touch': Replicas and Replicators of Vladimir Tatlin's *Monument to the Third International: The Great Adventure of Pontus Hulten*," in *Tatlin: New Art for a New World*, ed. Museum Tinguely (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2012), pp. 123–29.

2. A detailed analysis of the many and varied recyclings remains to be written; in the meantime, see Jürgen Harten, "Tatlin: A Legend of the Twentieth-Century Avant-Garde," in *Tatlin: New Art for a New World*, pp. 198–209.

3. See the major essays and books on Tatlin's tower by Troels Andersen, Klaus Bollinger and Florian Medicus, John Bowlit, Svetlana Boym, Dmitrii Dimakov, Hubertus Gassner, Jürgen Harten, Christina Lodder, Norbert Lynton, John Milner, James Nisbet, Margit Rowell, Jyrki Siukonen, Anatolii Strigalev, and Larissa Zhadova.

are in order. As is well known, the *Monument to the Third International* had its genesis in Lenin's Plan for Monumental Propaganda (1918), which proposed the demolition of imperial monuments and the creation and erection of fifty new monuments honoring outstanding figures in the revolutionary tradition, including philosophers, writers, scientists, artists, performing artists, and musicians. The implementation of this plan had been entrusted to Tatlin in his capacity as sometime head of the Moscow branch of IZO Narkompros, the fine-arts section of the People's Commissariat of Education and Enlightenment. With the assistance of colleagues, Tatlin sent a memorandum to Sovnarkom (the Council of People's Commissars) in summer 1918 proposing that "the monuments should be erected in boulevards, public gardens and the like in all districts of Moscow, with quotations or maxims engraved on pedestals or surroundings so that these monuments should appear like street rostra from which living words should fly to the mass of the people, stimulating minds and consciousness of thought."<sup>4</sup> Far from exclusively memorializing the dead, therefore, the new monuments were to be disseminators of "living words," and thus specifically agitational in function.

But in the process of unveiling what turned out to be one conventional sculptural bust or figure after another by those artists who contributed to the plan—a total disappointment given his own radical practice of counter-reliefs in the 1910s—Tatlin decided to propose his own monument to the revolution. On the likely nature of his initial proposal, we can refer to a substantial article published in March 1919 by his friend, colleague, and apologist, the art critic Nikolai Punin, in the Narkompros-sponsored futurist newspaper, *Iskusstvo kommuna* (Art of the commune).<sup>5</sup> (This article is not to be confused with the better-known booklet on the monument that Punin prepared in summer 1920.<sup>6</sup>) Long thought to ventriloquize the ever-laconic Tatlin, with whom Punin enjoyed an especially close relationship at the time, the 1919 text might also be understood as representing a dialogue or collaboration between the two, or even, at the most extreme, a programmatic directive by the critic, who had become the head of the Petrograd branch of IZO Narkompros in 1918. But even if we cannot be fully certain as to the precise circumstances of its composition, this early essay remains an informative text that explicitly connects Tatlin's project to a pan-European futurist aesthetic.

Punin opens the essay with a polemical critique of the Plan for Monumental Propaganda, which he considers an utter failure due to a complete mismatch between the task at hand—homage to the revolution—and the means employed

4. Vladimir Tatlin, "Memorandum of the Moscow Artistic Collegium of the People's Commissariat of Education to the Council of People's Commissars, on the Erection in Moscow of 50 Monuments to Outstanding Figures in the Area of Revolutionary and Social Activity, in Philosophy, Literature, Sciences, and the Arts," in *Tatlin*, ed. Larissa Alekseevna Zhadova, trans. Colin Wright et al. (New York: Rizzoli, 1988), p. 185.

5. Nikolai Punin, "O pamiatnikakh," *Iskusstvo kommuna* 14 (March 9, 1919), pp. 2–3; partial trans. in Andersen, *Vladimir Tatlin*, pp. 56–57.

6. Nikolai Punin, *Pamiatnik III Internatsionala* (Petrograd: IZO Narkompros, 1920); trans. as "The Monument to the Third International," in Zhadova, *Tatlin*, pp. 344–47.

thus far, namely, figurative representation in traditional sculptural mediums. Having dismissed all contributions to date, he then turns to the explication and promotion of Tatlin's alternative proposal for a monument to the revolution, which he describes as a radical synthesis of architecture, painting, and sculpture. He offers little apropos the precise form this synthesis will take, revealing only that it will comprise a monolithic structure of simple geometric volumes, such as cubes, cylinders, spheres, cones, segments of circles, spherical planes, and sections thereof. He is much more eager to impart a sense of Tatlin's conception of the monument as a kind of multimedia agitational center that would embrace a futurist emphasis on perpetual motion and the new media communication technologies of wireless telegraphy, radio broadcasting, and film.

The monument's interior will contain halls for gymnastics that can be utilized for different purposes on demand, thereby factoring "continuous mobility" (*nepřeryvnaia podvizhnost'*) into their very functionality. An "agitation center" will circulate proclamations and leaflets throughout the city by means of a special squad of motorcycles and automobiles; housed within a dedicated garage inside the monument, this squad will serve as a mobile and ever-ready agitational apparatus. Visitors to the building will be set in motion—there will be no standing around in one place, and certainly never any sitting down. Elevators will transport guests from one level of the monument to another. At one moment visitors may chance upon a live orator declaiming aloud an agitational slogan, and at the next, a radio broadcast of the latest news, government decrees, resolutions, and technological inventions. Through its emphasis on perpetual motion, Punin asserts, the monument will become a space of spectacular enchantment, of spectral wonderment, of spectacle itself, one that is truly "worthy of our revolution."

Attached to the monument's exterior will be a gigantic film screen for the projection of newsreels detailing the latest information on cultural and political life from around the globe; at night, slogans will be projected directly onto the sky, which brings to mind the poet Velimir Khlebnikov's 1918 proposal to convert clouds into projection screens.<sup>7</sup> Like the Eiffel Tower with which it is clearly in dialogue, Tatlin's monument will boast a radio antenna powerful enough to send and receive international broadcasts, thereby mitigating the restricted flow of information under the Western blockade. It will house a telephone exchange and a telegraph station, along with other such "information apparatuses," as well as a printing workshop and studios. Punin emphasizes that these various technological features will constitute not just the monument's "content" but its very form and structure. Fantastic in the extreme, Tatlin's initial conceptualization of the monument—at least as reported by Punin in March 1919—takes the form of something like a gigantic, mobility-mad, multitasking, spectacle-producing communication device dedicated to revolutionary agitation.

7. On Khlebnikov's proposal, see Jyrki Siukonen, *Uplifted Spirits, Earthbound Machines: Studies on Artists and the Dream of Flight, 1900–1935* (Helsinki: Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura, 2001), p. 155.

It was not until March 1920, a full year after the publication of Punin's text, however, that Tatlin finally began construction of his model with the assistance of Schapiro, Iosif Meerzon, and Pavel Vinogradov.<sup>8</sup> In the process, much of his early futurist fantasy about mobile media saturation fell away, to be replaced by an all-consuming struggle to wrest from the obdurate materiality of wood a dynamic structure worthy of the revolution. A few archival photographs stage the process by which Tatlin and his team—along with friends and associates, such as the experimental painter and Narkompros staffer Sofia Dymshits-Tolstaia and Punin himself—hammered the model into being.<sup>9</sup> In a diary entry dated July 17, 1920, Punin records his experience of life and work in Tatlin's studio at the time, detailing the collective manual labor, hunger, shortage, base humor, and even infantile behavior that underpinned the construction process: "This evening," Punin confides, "I built the 'Monument' with Tatlin. We worked on gluing the rods. . . . [Dymshits-]Tolstaia worked on her stained glass and cooked kasha. . . . They eat like sailors and, like the 'dregs of society,' fight one another for food from the tender's hands, which could break horseshoes from all the work they've done. . . . They eat a whole potful . . . it is merry; as at home, in the nursery. They make jokes . . . with all their might about painting, art, modernism, and so on. If a patch doesn't work on someone's rod, they yell out laughing, 'Modernism!' and Tatlin slowly and sternly admonishes, 'Work on you swine, you'll get better.'"<sup>10</sup>



*Model under construction.  
Petrograd. 1920.*

The model that resulted from these labors thematizes continuous mobility in a way that is as much structural (spiraling lathes, diagonal girder) and literal (revolving volumes) as it is technological (the press bureau and radio station housed in its upper two volumes, the latter continuing "the monument in[to] the

8. Listed on a poster published at the time are the names of several other assistants who helped construct the model, including Pchel'nikova, Terletskii, Dormidontov, Stakanov, and Khapaev; see Anatolii Strigalev, "Iskusstvo konstruktivistov: Ot vystavki—k vystavke (1914–32)," *Sovetskoe iskusstvoznanie* (Moscow) 27 (1991), p. 140.

9. Dymshits-Tolstaia was responsible for the design of the monument's glass components (see *ibid.*, p. 140), probably because of her novel experiments at the time with glass as a support for painting and collage.

10. Nikolai Punin, *The Diaries of Nikolai Punin: 1904–1953*, ed. Sidney Mona and Jennifer Greene Krupala, trans. Jennifer Greene Krupala (Austin: University of Texas Press 1999), p. 67.

air,” as Viktor Shklovsky put it<sup>11</sup>). “The whole form is vacillating like a steel snake held together and united into a structure through one common movement of all its parts so as to rise above the ground,” Punin writes in summer 1920. “The form strives to overcome the material and the force of gravity; the force of resistance is great and massive; by flexing its muscles the form is searching for the way out along the most resilient and dynamic lines the world knows of—the spirals. They are full of movement, aspiration, and speed, and they are as tight as a creative will and an arm-muscle strained with holding a hammer.”<sup>12</sup>

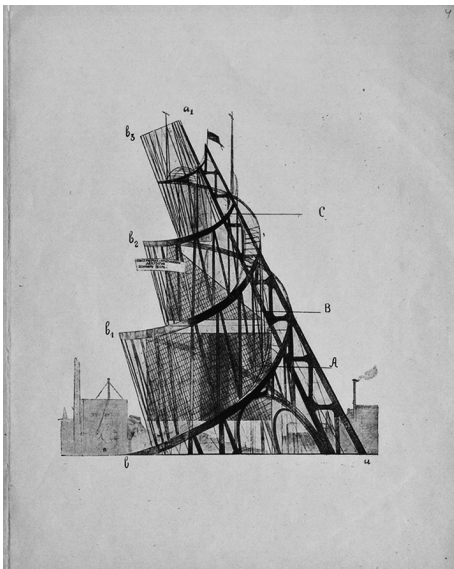
In September 1920, even before it was completed, there was talk of mobilizing Tatlin’s model on a Petrograd square during the anniversary celebrations that November, as part of a mass spectacle (*massovoe zrelishche*) dedicated to garnering public and party support for the full-scale realization of his monument to the revolution, but this plan did not come to fruition.<sup>13</sup> Instead, the model began its public life during the November celebrations in the form of an exhibition held in Tatlin’s studio and open to the public from November 8 through December 1, 1920, by which point it had been repurposed as a monument to the Third International. The showing included two related drawings and a slew of wall-mounted programmatic slogans.<sup>14</sup> Posters disseminated throughout the city announced both the show’s opening and a public forum to which representa-

11. Viktor Shklovsky, “Pamiatnik Tret’emu Internatsionalu,” *Zhizn’ iskusstva*, January 5–9, 1921; trans. as “The Monument to the Third International,” in Zhadova, *Tatlin*, p. 343.

12. Punin, “The Monument to the Third International,” p. 345.

13. *Krasnaia gazeta*, September 19, 1920; cited in Anatolii Strigalev, “O proekte Pamiatnika III-emu Internatsionalu khudozhnika V. Tatlina,” in *Voprosy sovetskogo izobrazitel’nogo iskusstva i arkhitektury* (Moscow, 1973), pp. 417–18.

14. See Strigalev, “Iskusstvo konstruktivistov,” p. 139.



Vladimir Tatlin. Elevation drawing for the model. 1920.



Poster announcing public exhibition of the model in Tatlin's studio, Petrograd, November 1920.

tives of trade unions, military units, and naval crews were invited.<sup>15</sup>

A similar discussion meeting was held in Moscow at the Paul Cézanne Club on December 14, 1920, in order to debate the ideological, aesthetic, and utilitarian merits of the project, as well as its feasibility from an engineering point of view. At the meeting Tatlin presented a “very short paper,” to which Lissitzky gave a formal response. “I could have destroyed the entire monument (photographs of the model and my conversation with Tatlin only increased the power of my research),” he writes to his friend and mentor in Vitebsk, Kazimir

Malevich, one of Tatlin's long-standing rivals:

Like Unovis, however, I believe that we should support it as a concrete new achievement. . . . I nevertheless called on everyone to criticize and analyze the construction, demonstrating that the synthesis of painting, sculpture, and architecture is self-deception, that its synthesis with utilitarianism is a childish lack of consideration and fiction, that the relationship with the material is pernicious, that the construction is aesthetic and artistic, and not creative (dismantled, I saw that the model can stand without the spiral, it wears it like a general wears the order of St. Andrew) and that for a whole series of reasons listed by me, it is the *sum of all the mistakes of the past* and the desire to correspond not to Venus, but to modernity.<sup>16</sup>

Lissitzky adds that Naum Gabo seconded his criticisms, while Osip Brik and Vladimir Mayakovsky—who would famously celebrate Tatlin's tower as “the first monument without a beard”—leapt, by contrast, to its defense.<sup>17</sup>

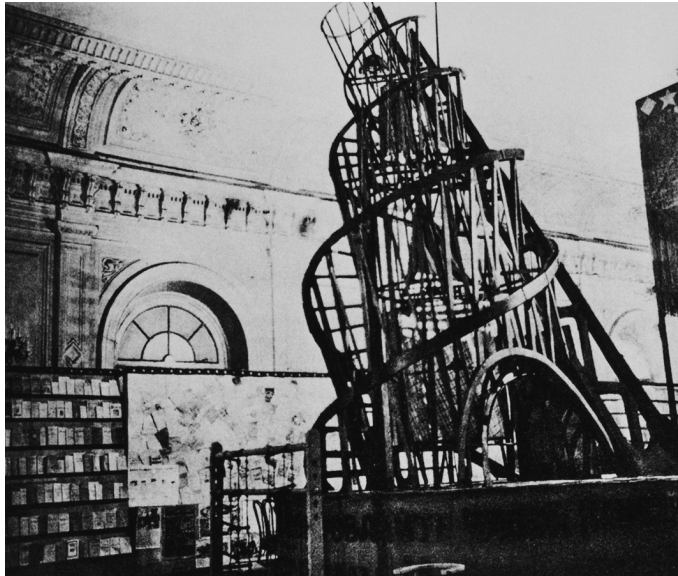
Later that month, the model was dismantled and shipped to Moscow, where Tatlin reassembled it for display in the first of two exhibitions held in the Dom Soiuzov (House of Unions), the headquarters of the central Soviet trade-union organization. An imperial-period building located on Okhotnyi ryad near the Kremlin, the House of Unions played a legendary role in early Soviet history—it

15. See *Zhizn' iskusstva*, November 12, 1920; cited in Strigalev, “O proekte Pamiatnika III-emu Internatsionalu khudozhnika V. Tatlina,” p. 418.

16. El Lissitzky, Moscow, to Kazimir Malevich, Vitebsk, December 21, 1920; Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, Khardzhiev Archive, inv. no. 729, folio pages 2–4; trans. Kenneth MacInnes in *In Malevich's Circle: Confederates, Students, Followers in Russia, 1920s–1950s*, ed. Irina Karasik (St. Petersburg: Palace Editions, 2003), p. 53.

17. See Christina Lodder, *Russian Constructivism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), p. 61.





*Tatlin's installation of the model at the central press agency's exhibition in honor of the Eighth Congress of Soviets, House of Unions, Moscow. December 1920.*

was here, for example, that deceased Bolshevik leaders, including Lenin himself, were laid in state for public viewing. But the building also seems to have served as an early venue for a then newly emerging mode of exhibition practice, the Soviet trade fair. The first of the exhibitions in which Tatlin's model appeared opened in late December 1920 in honor of the Eighth Congress of Soviets.<sup>18</sup> An assembly of representatives of local councils from across Soviet Russia—and thus nominally the highest political and administrative organ of the new state—the congress met in the capital a few times a year for the purposes of formulating, ratifying, and, increasingly, rubber-stamping Bolshevik Party policy. (It was at the Eighth Congress, for example, that Lenin presented GOELRO, the national plan for the electrification of Soviet Russia.) In the exhibition—an elaborate exercise in Soviet self-presentation for the benefit of congress members who had gathered in Moscow from near and far as well as the general public—Tatlin's model stands adjacent to shelves and shelves of printed matter in what is now known as the Buffet, adjacent to the building's storied Colonnade Hall.<sup>19</sup>

According to a favorable and informative review published on the front page

18. This photograph was first published in Zhadova, *Tatlin*, p. 279, fig. 181.

19. This identification is made on the basis of a comparison of period photographs of the interior of the building.

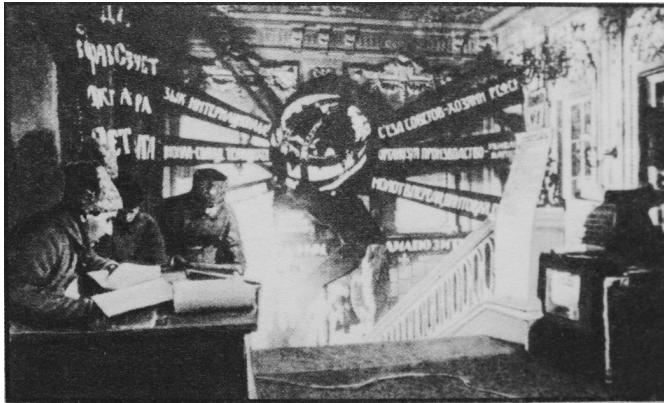
of the daily government-run newspaper *Izvestiia* by Mikhail Kol'tsov, a young journalist who would later gain prominence as the founding editor of *Ogonek* (Little flame), *SSSR na stroike* (USSR in construction), and other photo-illustrated magazines, the overall curator of the congress show was one Boris Malkin, a literary figure and party activist.<sup>20</sup> Malkin is best known to art historians as the head of the centralized IZOGIZ—the State Publishing House for Art—during the cultural revolution of the first Five-Year Plan in the late 1920s and early '30s, and thus as the government official who exercised monopoly control over the distribution of graphic-design commissions to poster artists such as Gustavs Klucis, Valentina Kulagina, and Aleksandr Deineka. But in 1920 Malkin headed the central press agency for the distribution of printed matter, *Tsentropechat'*, which reported directly to the All-Russian Central Executive Committee, VTISK. On December 8, 1920, a notice appeared on the front page of the party newspaper *Pravda* calling for the various people's commissariats to send to Malkin's office sundry exhibition materials—including illustrations, charts, and reports—pertaining to their work and achievements to date.<sup>21</sup> The congress exhibition thus represented a vast expansion of the activities of a traditional press agency; where once Malkin might have been responsible for a book fair, he was now in charge of organizing a vast trade fair that would attempt to survey and thereby promote every area of Soviet endeavor over the past three years. For its part, Narkompros sent along Tatlin's model for inclusion in the show, along with much other material.

Kol'tsov refers to the show as a specifically “Soviet trade fair” (*sovetskaiia iarmarka*) that showcases the Communist emancipation of labor and the growth of proletarian resourcefulness, in sharp contrast to its capitalist counterparts. He credits Malkin's “indefatigable and restless energy”—and the help of dozens of assistants—for bringing the show to fruition in just two weeks. The building being jam-packed with visitors, the mood is festive and celebratory, Kol'tsov reports, in keeping with the exhibition's objective of honoring and entertaining congress members. He defines the exhibition as qualitatively different from “hundreds” of other ostensibly similar shows, with their dreary diagrams and charts tacked up on the wall, didactic shows that nobody visits. Malkin has produced, instead, a total transformation of the House of Unions into what Kol'tsov calls an “enlightening spectacle” (*pouchitelnoe zrelishe*). Stuffed to the gills, not a single square inch of free space is to be found.

No photograph accompanies Kol'tsov's article, but one found elsewhere reveals an elaborate array of wall-mounted banners and slogans spewing forth from a central globe that transforms the building's grand ceremonial staircase into a spectacular agitational stage. In the left foreground, a trio of Red Army men are fully absorbed in their reading matter, notwithstanding the visual noise that engulfs them. Another photograph shows the contents of gallery no. 7—one of the enfilade of spaces that composes the foyer of Colonnade Hall—a Young Pioneer sits absorbed at a desk, the space around her crammed with examples of Soviet production and details of its achievements, the display clearly outdoing the hall's

20. Mikhail Kol'tsov, “Sovetskaiia iarmarka,” *Izvestiia*, December 26, 1920, p. 1.

21. *Pravda*, December 8, 1920, p. 1.



*View of main staircase (top)  
and gallery no. 7 (bottom)  
at the Eighth Congress of  
Soviets exhibition.*

imperial-period architectural ornament. Other exhibition halls included a vast range of industrial and consumer products, along with a stage maquette for a play directed by Vsevolod Meyerhold, an enormous quantity of books and photographs, several agitational films, and the first-ever Russian radio-telephone, this last apparently even in working order.

Finally, in the gallery showcasing the work and achievements of the central press agency itself, there was Tatlin's model, displayed in conjunction with several kiosks that busily distributed printed matter to congress members. "Right there,"

Kol'tsov writes, “the *Monument to the Third International* towers above—a gigantic mind-bending thing made of iron and glass [*sic*].” Kol'tsov elaborates no further, however, despite the bewildering impression the model must surely have made in this particular context. According to a review of recent Russian exhibitions published in *Veshch'* (Berlin) in spring 1922 by none other than Lissitzky, Tatlin and two of his assistants stood beside the model after they'd finished installing it in order to explain “the meaning and purpose of the towering monument” to representatives from as far afield as Siberia, Turkestan, Crimea, and Ukraine.<sup>22</sup> Detailed explanatory notes were also hung alongside it for the further edification of visitors.<sup>23</sup> In the daily bulletin of the congress, Tatlin, Schapiro, Meerzon, and Vinogradov published a brief statement in which they drew a parallel between political and aesthetic revolution, claimed a pedigree for the monument project in Tatlin's sculptural practice of the mid-1910s, and concluded with a polemical call for the creation of a new world: “The fruits of this are models which give rise to discoveries serving the creation of a new world and which call upon producers to control the forms of the new life around us.”<sup>24</sup> Tatlin's efforts to enlighten visitors about the nature and significance of his model were likely at least in part an attempt to secure the political and fiscal support of the Congress of Soviets and the party leadership, which would be essential for its construction at full scale.

But to understand why Tatlin's model was located in the exhibition hall of the central press agency itself—rather than in, say, the one devoted to Narkompros—it is worth noting that Malkin's agency had expanded its purview considerably since its foundation. With a staff in Moscow alone numbering some 4,000, the agency was responsible for the production of all kinds of print media—newspapers, journals, slogans, books, brochures, posters, reviews, leaflets, and proclamations—and for the distribution of such media through its vast network of branches, railway-station kiosks, and agitational points or centers (*agit-punkty*) located throughout Soviet Russia. But the agency also oversaw what was called oral agitation, producing gramophone recordings of speeches delivered by the Bolshevik leadership, including fifteen records by Lenin alone, which it then broadcast through agit-train stops and its network of kiosks.<sup>25</sup> Given the expanded role of the agency in Soviet culture during the civil-war period, the model would have had special appeal for Malkin and his col-

22. Ulen (pseud. El Lissitzky), “Die Ausstellungen in Russland,” *Veshch' Objet Gegenstand* (Berlin) 1–2 (March–April 1922), p. 19. Despite his negative comments at the Cézanne Club in 1920, Lissitzky was quite positive in his public presentation of Tatlin's project to Western European audiences in 1922–23; see his “New Russian Art: A Lecture” (1923), trans. in Sophie Lissitzky-Küppers, *El Lissitzky: Life, Letters, Texts*, trans. Helene Aldwinckle and Mary Whittall (New York: Thames & Hudson, 1980), p. 342. He even incorporated a photograph of Tatlin at work on the model into a photo-collage maquette for the illustration of his friend Ilya Ehrenburg's *Shest' poviestei o legkikh kotsakh* (Six Stories with Easy Endings) (1922).

23. Aleksei Sidorov, “Punin. N.: *Pamiatnik III Internatsionala*. Proekt khud. V. E. Tatlina,” *Pechat' i revoliutsiia* 2 (August–October 1921), p. 217.

24. Vladimir Tatlin, Tevel' Schapiro, Iosif Meerzon, and Pavel Vinogradov, “Nasha predstoiashchaia rabota,” *VIII S"ezd Sovetov (Ezhednevnyi biulleten' s"ezda)*, January 1, 1921, p. 11; trans. in Zhadova, *Tatlin*, p. 239.

25. On the central press agency, see Alexei Nazarov, *Oktiabr' i kniga: Sozdanie sovetskikh izdatel'stv i formirovanie massovogo chitatelia, 1917–1923* (Moscow: Nauka, 1968), pp. 222–31.

leagues as a proposal for a monument in the form not just of a building but of a mobility-conscious, multimedia agitational center.

Tatlin's model remained in the House of Unions after the exhibition had closed, and was then repurposed for a second trade fair, this time in honor of the international delegates to the Third Congress of the Comintern, which met in Moscow in summer 1921. (This show should be distinguished from the conventional exhibition of easel paintings that was contemporaneously organized in honor of the Third Congress in the Hotel Kontinental', where some of its delegates were residing.)<sup>26</sup> A detailed exhibition review published in *Izvestiia* reports that Tatlin's model served once again as the centerpiece of the central press agency's installation, the walls of which were lined with thousands of brochures and books "in all the languages of the world." The show's other exhibition halls were dedicated to the exposition of the history of the Bolshevik Party, the Red

*Group portrait of delegates to the Third Congress of the Comintern, with a partial view of an exhibition of modernist paintings, Hotel Kontinental', Moscow. Summer 1921.*

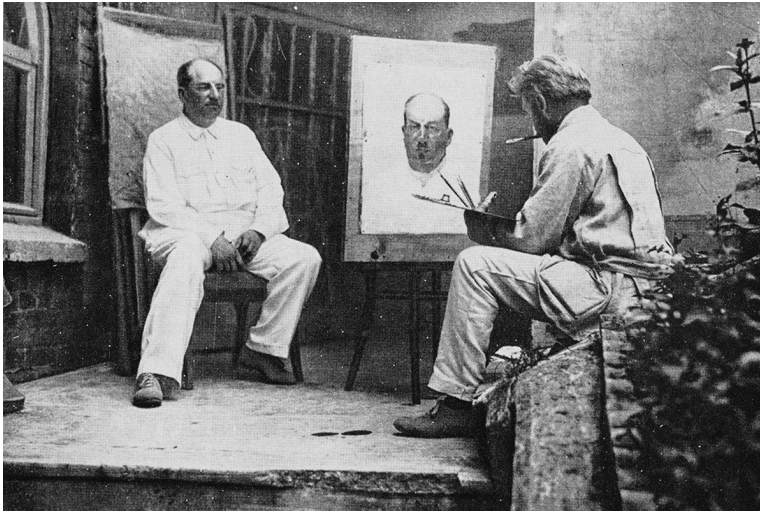


Army, Soviet agriculture, health, education, diplomacy, and industrial production, the international workers' movement, the international Communist press, inventions and advances in the realm of transportation and communication technologies (including a new kind of telegraph machine by the engineer Trusevich), and so on. At the exhibition's entrance, a radio transmitter—a powerful symbol of Soviet Russia's link to the rest of the world, and thus of the Comintern itself—greeted delegates while they perused monumental schematic maps of the country's vast radio network.<sup>27</sup>

There Tatlin's model remained at least through the following year, when Anatoly Lunacharsky, the commissar of Narkompros, lambasted it in a discussion of

26. See Aleksandra Shatskikh, "A Brief History of Obmokhu," in *The Great Utopia: The Russian and Soviet Avant-Garde, 1915–1932* (New York: Guggenheim Museum, 1992), p. 264.

27. Anon, "Okolo kongressa: Vystavka Komintern," *Izvestiia*, July 6, 1921, p. 2.



*Anatoly Lunacharsky having his portrait painted. Kislovodsk. Summer 1926.*

art's role in the service of the Soviet state published in *Izvestiia* in January 1922. Noting that the model was still on view in the House of Unions, he dismissed it as a "paradoxical" structure, compared it unfavorably to the Eiffel Tower, and forewarned that the realization in Moscow or Petrograd of "such a product from the creative imagination of one of the most important artists of the leftist school" would be a matter of very grave concern.<sup>28</sup> These harsh words may surprise us somewhat, given that Lunacharsky is known for his substantial, if never entirely unambivalent, support for leftist and futurist artists in the immediate wake of the October Revolution ("The dynamism and methods of collective creative work which are so characteristic of futurist art stand in some sort of relationship to what the proletariat may create in the artistic field," he once said).<sup>29</sup> But by 1920 he had grown impatient with both the avant-garde's radical experiments and its polemical intolerance toward more conventional tendencies: "Futurism has dropped behind," a furious Mayakovsky reported the commissar as having declared that year, "it already stinks. . . . [T]here is no need to look for any Picasso for the proletariat."<sup>30</sup> Comparable derision inflects his published judgment on Tatlin's tower, notwithstanding the fact that the latter had been produced under the auspices of Narkompros, the commissariat of which he himself was the head. But Lunacharsky was far from alone in his criticism. Also largely nega-

28. Anatolii Lunacharskii, "Sovetskoe gosudarstvo i iskusstvo," *Izvestiia*, January 29, 1922, p. 2.

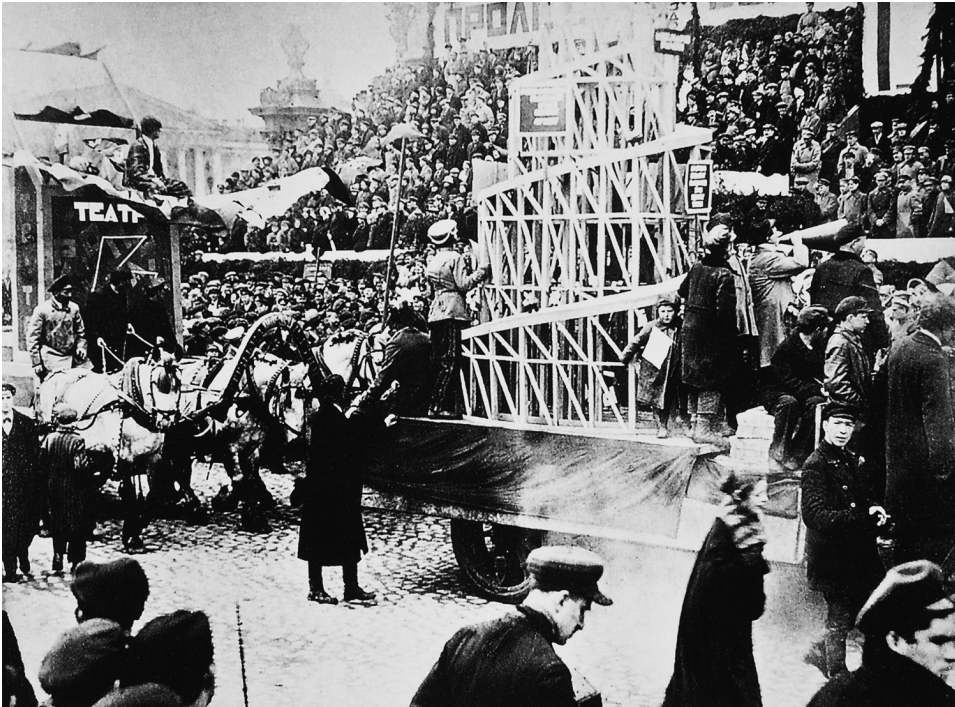
29. Anatolii Lunacharskii, *Ob izobrazitel'nom iskusstve* (Moscow: Sovetskii khudozhnik, 1967), vol. 2, pp. 301–2; quoted in Sheila Fitzpatrick, *The Commissariat of Enlightenment: Soviet Organization of Education and the Arts under Lunacharsky, October 1917–1921* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), p. 127.

30. Quoted in Fitzpatrick, *The Commissariat of Enlightenment*, p. 155.

tive was Lev Trotsky's commentary just a couple of years later: Calling into question the purposefulness of the artist's "own personal invention," Trotsky writes that "meetings are not necessarily held in a cylinder and the cylinder does not necessarily have to rotate. I remember seeing once when a child, a wooden temple built in a beer bottle. This fired my imagination, but I did not ask myself at that time what it was for. Tatlin proceeds by a reverse method; he wants to construct a beer bottle . . . which would sit in a spiral concrete temple. But for the moment, I cannot refrain from the question: What is it for?"<sup>31</sup>

After its drubbing by the commissar in 1922, the trail of the original model goes cold. The next reference we have is only to a crude redaction of its skeletal armature that was slapped together by art students in 1925 and mobilized as a float in a May Day parade in Leningrad; megaphone in hand, a participant addresses members of the party leadership who are standing in the bleachers, including possibly Stalin. That same year, Tatlin executed a much smaller and simplified version of his original model for the Exposition internationale des arts décoratifs et industriels modernes held in the Grand Palais in Paris. Of the original model itself, however, there seem to be no known sightings after 1922.

31. See Leon Trotsky, *Literature and Revolution*, trans. Rose Strunsky (New York: International Publishers, 1925), pp. 247–48.



*Anonymous redaction of Tatlin's  
model for May Day demonstration.  
Leningrad, 1925.*

Nevertheless, the spectacularization of Tatlin's model in the House of Unions in the early '20s suggests that there is another aspect to the long and generous legacy of *Monument to the Third International*, namely, its role in the formation of a new medium for avant-garde practice, that of the Soviet trade fair. In 1923, numerous progressive artists would be among those who contributed to the design and installation of 196 pavilions at the inaugural All-Russian Agricultural and Handicraft Industries Exhibition, which was held in Moscow's Gorky Park. In 1924, Klucis and Sergei Sen'kin designed the installation of a major agitational print-media exhibition in honor of the Fifth Congress of the Comintern in Georgievskii Hall in the Great Kremlin Palace. But it was Lissitzky—who had reviewed Tatlin's exhibition of his model in the House of Unions, as if already perceiving in the trade fair a new arena for artistic production—who would become the leading Soviet designer of exhibitions in the second half of the '20s.

In 1926, while teaching interior and furniture design at the Vkhutemas in Moscow, Lissitzky designed a prototype for the exhibition of contemporary art, which he installed as the *Raum für konstruktive Kunst* at the International Art Exhibition in Dresden. Far from being a one-off work of installation art, this space was designed to showcase not only his own newly found interest in issues of standardization in archi-



Gustavs Klucis and Sergei Sen'kin. *Installation of poster display at exhibition held in honor of the Fifth Congress of the Comintern. Moscow, summer 1924.*

ture (it “should present a standard [Standard] for spaces in which new art is shown to the public”<sup>32</sup>), but also his companion Sophie Küppers's intrepid business as a dealer in pan-European modern art. As such, the Dresden space represents a liminal stage in the artist's trajectory. Though he would reprise its design for Alexander Dorner at the Landesmuseum Hannover in 1927–28, thereby fulfilling the objective he had set himself—to produce a prototype for the exhibition of new art—Lissitzky would henceforth dedicate his work in the field of exhibition design to the showcasing and promotion of distinctly Soviet achievements at home and abroad, beginning with a robust survey of recent innovations in print media, photography, photomontage, and graphic design in Gorky Park

32. Lissitzky, “2 Demonstrationsräume,” n.d. (ca. 1926), typescript, Sprengel Museum Hannover; trans. in Lissitzky-Küppers, *El Lissitzky*, p. 366. For an analysis of Lissitzky's Dresden and Hannover demonstration spaces, see Maria Gough, “Constructivism Disoriented: El Lissitzky's Dresden and Hannover *Demonstrationsräume*,” in *Situating Lissitzky: Vitebsk, Berlin, Moscow*, ed. Nancy Perloff and Brian Reed (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2003), pp. 77–125.





*View of the Soviet pavilion at the International Press Exhibition (“Pressa”). Cologne, 1928. From left to right: Agitational structures by Nikolai Simon, Gustavs Klucis, and El Lissitzky.*

(All-Union Polygraphic Exhibition, 1927), and continuing with a series of collaboratively produced Soviet pavilions for international trade fairs in Cologne (International Press Exhibition or *Pressa*, 1928), Stuttgart (*Film und Foto*, or *FiFo*, 1929), Dresden (International Hygiene Exhibition, 1930), Leipzig (International Fur Trade Exhibition, 1930), and beyond.<sup>33</sup>

Thanks to Benjamin Buchloh’s groundbreaking discussion of Lissitzky’s radical “transformation of modernist montage aesthetics into an instrument of mass education and enlightenment” in the pages of this journal three decades ago,<sup>34</sup> the artist’s Soviet pavilions are best known today for their monumental photographic friezes and other architectural-scale uses of photography. But the broad transformation Buchloh describes extends also to Lissitzky’s choreography in these same pavilions of a great mass of information in a variety of other media and

33. See Igor Riazantsev, *Iskusstvo sovetского vystavochного ansambli: 1917–1970: Raboty khudozhnikov Moskvy i Leningrad* (Moscow: Sovetskii khudozhnik, 1976), pp. 11–136. On the 1923 agricultural exhibition, see also the documents in *Vystavochnye ansambli SSSR, 1920–1930-e gody: Materialy i dokumenty*, ed. V. P. Tolstoi (Moscow: Galart, 2006), pp. 15–34.

34. Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, “From Faktura to Factography,” *October* 30 (Fall 1984), p. 118. See also the anthology inspired by Buchloh’s analysis, *Public Photographic Spaces: Propaganda Exhibitions from Pressa to The Family of Man, 1928–55*, ed. Jorge Ribalta (Barcelona: Museu d’Art Contemporani de Barcelona, 2008).

platforms, such as books, magazines, brochures, diagrams, charts, and a motley fleet of rotary- or electrically powered display stands, agitational structures, and machine-like devices and contraptions, all in the service of what could be called an enlightening spectacle, to borrow Kol'tsov's prescient expression that I quoted earlier. Just inside the main entrance to Lissitzky's pavilion at Pressa, for example, a crowd throngs around a towering display structure dedicated to the dissemination of information about the role being played by trade unions in the reorganization of the Soviet economy. Designed by Nikolai Simon, one of the team of artists who worked on the show with Lissitzky, this agitational structure comprises a giant hammer encircled by an agglomeration of wooden lathes and signage; a smaller hammer and sickle punctuates the tower's upper reaches, while a flood of printed matter appears to spew forth from its base. This structure clearly mimics the morphology of Tatlin's *Monument to the Third International*, all the while substituting the latter's extraordinary sculptural inventiveness at a time of civil war and chronic material shortage with the now fully established symbology—in the form of hammer and sickle—of a Communist state on the brink of inaugurating its first Five-Year Plan's program of crash industrialization and forced agricultural collectivization. In that very mimicry, however, Simon's tower reminds us that Tatlin's model was not only a model for a monument that was never built, but at the same time a model for the Soviet avant-garde's major engagement with a new medium of spectacle and enlightenment, that of the trade fair.