

ALEKSANDR RODCHENKO WAS THE SON OF A PROPMAN AND A LAUNDRESS. AT THE BEGINNING OF THE SOVIET REVOLUTION, HE TRANSFORMED HIMSELF FROM A PAINTER INTO SOMETHING ENTIRELY NEW.

He became a constructor, an assembler, more engineer than artist. Inspired by Kazimir Malevich's *Black Square*, and the Suprematist movement as a whole, he turned away from representational art and grasped firmly to beliefs in utility and industry. Working intently in his self-designed leather workman's "production suit," Rodchenko utilized new technology and mass production in an attempt to give form not just to revolutionary concepts of functionalism and economy but to ideal Soviet citizens as well.¹ He embraced, redefined, and elevated graphic design as an essential force in society. In his "laboratory" Rodchenko and his great collaborator, love, and wife, Varvara Stepanova, repositioned artists as agents of social change standing at the center of a brave new world. We know Rodchenko's work. His distinctive style of geometric letterforms, flat color, diagonal composition, angled photography, and striking photomontage helped give visual voice to constructivism. His manifesto reminds us of the vision for society, and the designers within it, that these familiar images represent.

¹ For a detailed discussion of Rodchenko's belief in the ideal Soviet citizen, see Victor Margolin, *The Struggle for Utopia: Rodchenko, Lissitzky, Moholy-Nagy, 1917-1946* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

WHO WE ARE MANIFESTO OF THE CONSTRUCTIVIST GROUP

ALEKSANDR RODCHENKO, VARVARA STEPANOVA, AND ALEKSEI GAN | C. 1922

We don't feel obliged to build Pennsylvania Stations, skyscrapers,
Handley Page Tract houses, turbo-compressors, and so on.

We didn't create technology.

We didn't create man.

BUT WE,

Artists yesterday

CONSTRUCTORS today,

1. WE PROCESSED

the human being

2. WE ORGANIZE

technology

1. WE DISCOVERED

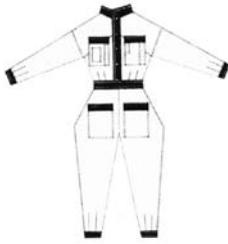
2. PROPAGATE

3. CLEAN OUT

4. MERGE

PREVIOUSLY—Engineers relaxed with art

NOW—Artists relax with technology



ALEKSANDR RODCHENKO
Sketch of "production clothing,"
1922.

WHAT'S NEEDED—IS NO REST

Who saw A WALL...

Who saw JUST A PLANE—

EVERYONE... AND NO ONE

Someone who had actually seen came and simply SHOWED:
the square.

This means opening the eyes TO THE PLANE.

Who saw an ANGLE

Who saw an ARMATURE, SKETCH

EVERYONE... AND NO ONE.

Someone who had actually seen came and simply SHOWED:

A line

Who saw: an iron bridge

a dreadnought

a zeppelin

a helicopter

EVERYONE... AND NO ONE.

We Came—the first working group of CONSTRUCTIVISTS—

ALEKSEI GAN, RODCHENKO, STEPANOVA

... AND WE SIMPLY SAID: This is—today

Technology is—the mortal enemy of art.

TECHNOLOGY...

We—are your first fighting and punitive force.

We are also your last slave-workers.

We are not dreamers from art who build in the imagination:

Aeroradiostations

Elevators and

Flaming cities

WE—ARE THE BEGINNING

OUR WORK IS TODAY:

A mug

A floor brush

Boots

A catalog

And when one person in his laboratory set up

A square,

His radio carried it to all and sundry, to those who needed it and those who didn't need it, and soon on all the "ships of left art," sailing under red,

black, and white flags... everything all over, throughout, everything was covered in squares.

And yesterday, when one person in his laboratory set up
A line, grid, and point

His radio carried it to all and sundry, to those who needed it and those who didn't need it, and soon, and especially on all the "ships of left art" with the new title "constructive," sailing under different flags... everything all over... everything throughout is being constructed of lines and grids.

OF COURSE, the square existed previously, the line and the grid existed previously.

What's the deal.

Well, it's simply—THEY WERE POINTED OUT.

THEY WERE ANNOUNCED.

The square—1915, the laboratory of MALEVICH

The line, grid, point—1919, the laboratory of RODCHENKO

BUT—after this

The first working group of CONSTRUCTIVISTS (ALEKSEI GAN,
RODCHENKO, STEPANOVA)

announced:

THE COMMUNIST EXPRESSION OF MATERIAL CONSTRUCTIONS
and

IRRECONCILABLE WAR AGAINST ART.

Everything came to a point.

and "new" constructivists jumped on the bandwagon, wrote "constructive" poems, novels, paintings, and other such junk. Others, taken with our slogans, imagining themselves to be geniuses, designed elevators and radio posters, but they have forgotten that all attention should be concentrated on the experimental laboratories, which show us

NEW

elements

routes

things

experiments.

—THE DEMONSTRATION EXPERIMENTAL LABORATORY AND MATERIAL
CONSTRUCTIONS' STATION OF THE FIRST WORKING GROUP
OF CONSTRUCTIVISTS OF THE RSFSR.