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Siberian Trace of Russian Avant-garde 1920-1930

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Abstract

Siberia, often perceived as a culturally peripheral region, unexpectedly became a hub for the Russian avant-garde during the 1920-1930s. This study investigates how constructivism and related movements took root in Novosibirsk amid post-revolutionary turmoil, focusing on their impact on design, architecture, and education. Using historical-genetic analysis, the author traces the movement's legacy through archival records, exhibitions, and contemporary reinterpretations. Key findings reveal: Siberia, known as a place of exile, served as a refuge for some disgraced cultural figures and their families. This unpleasant fact, however, led to the formation of small cultural centers, which later gave rise to the paradoxical flowering of the avant-garde movement in Siberia, despite political and economic difficulties, its suppression during the Stalin era, and its revival in the following decades. The study highlights key figures such as El Lissitzky, local publications such as Current magazine, and contemporary efforts to preserve the avant-garde heritage in Novosibirsk.

Keywords

The Russian Avant-garde; Style constructivism; Graphic design; Painting; Graphics

1. Introduction

The Russian avant-garde in the period described had many trends. In this work, we are not faced with the task of classifying and describing all of these trends, however, it is inevitable to mention them here. We intentionally highlight one of the styles most characteristic of Russian soil. This is constructivism. It so happened that the barely born (founded in 1920) constructivism came to the still very young city of Novo-Nikolaevsk (status in 1904), which then received its new name Novosibirsk (1926), and before that had already acquired the high status of the capital of the Siberian region (1925) (Central Executive Committee, 1925). A capital city cannot survive without many administrative structures that need majestic buildings and therefore rapid construction begins here, for which architects are needed. In order to effectively govern, the government must communicate with the people with the help of the media and propaganda, and for this it needed journalists and artists. Thus, among the illiterate population of a small town, a cultural layer begins to grow. In the 1920s, Russia is in a state of ruin, poverty, degradation in all areas of the economy after the revolution and civil war. At this time, the Bolsheviks are just groping for totalitarian methods of leadership in a peaceful period and temporarily allow the free development of creative trends in all types of art, literature, and architectural design. In both capitals, along with classicism and realism, avant-garde trends that emerged before the revolution continue to develop, often now growing into radical leftist ones, confidently settling under communist banners and slogans. New trends arrive to Siberia with some delay, but here too they begin to develop rapidly and no less aggressively.

Before starting the study, it is necessary to define the terms. The fact is that the concept of design was established

in the USSR only in the 1970-1980s, initially at the everyday level among artists and architects. Administratively, this concept was consolidated only in 1989 with the creation of the Union of Designers of the USSR. Before that, specialists in this type of activity were called artist-designers. Simply put, artists carried out design developments. In Novosibirsk, only in 1965, by order of the West Siberian Council of the National Economy, the Special Artistic and Design Bureau of the Council of the National Economy was created for the first time, which began accepting orders from industrial enterprises throughout the USSR. Before that, artistic and design developments were carried out by the combine of the Union of Artists of the USSR and individual artists employed at large factories in Novosibirsk.

2. Method

This study is the next step in a consistent study of avant-garde phenomena in Novosibirsk in the 1920s, which influenced, with varying success, subsequent historical styles in architecture, design and fine art. The first article (Kurilov, 2025) of this series was devoted to the architecture of the aforementioned period, since the surviving buildings primarily provide clear evidence of that distinctive era. Other documents are less accessible and require greater effort to find, since they are more susceptible to the destructive effects of time: these are works of graphic design and fine art. In addition, of course, no study can do without reference to text documents of the corresponding time. In this regard, it should be noted that this study was conducted using the method of historical-genetic analysis, which makes it possible to identify cause-and-effect relationships in the study of such a unique phenomenon as the avant-garde heritage of Novosibirsk in the 1920s-1930s and changes in its perception and development to the present day.

3. Background

Our city received a huge boost to development in the 1920s. “Due to the fact that Novosibirsk became the administrative center of Siberia and was becoming its cultural center, it attracted artists from older and more cultured cities like Barnaul, Krasnoyarsk, Omsk, Tomsk like a magnet. This peculiarity of the city – the absence of Novosibirsk natives among the artists and the unsuitability of local life for the development of fine art in it – remained for half a century. On August 5, 1926, the New Siberia Artists’ Society was officially registered by the Siberian Administrative Department. At the same time, a branch of the Association of Artists of Revolutionary Russia (AKhRR), whose center was in Moscow, began operating in Novosibirsk.” (The history of the city, 2005).

Artistic life in Novosibirsk in the 1920s and 1930s was conscientiously studied by art critic Pavel Dmitrievich Muratov: “Politically active cultural figures sought to reorganize fine art into production, and to transfer artists to the position of workers at the *Izofabrika (a portmanteau of izobrazitelnaya fabrika, or ‘visual arts factory’ denotes state-sponsored collective studios that industrialized art production under Stalin)*. In Moscow, this tendency took visible forms. On May 28, 1934, with a large gathering of interested people, the foundation of the *Izofabrika* of the All-Russian Cooperative “Artist” was laid on the outskirts of Moscow in the Baltic settlement, in connection with which they talked about overcoming the apartment conditions, about the transition to collective methods of creating paintings, sculpture, graphics, and various forms of visual propaganda. In Novosibirsk, the construction of a multi-building, multi-profile *Izofabrika* was only occasionally discussed, but here there was the experience of the unrealized plan to build the Palace of Science and Culture. No one began to undertake another attempt at a great construction project for the benefit of culture. The local cooperative “Artist”, a branch of the Moscow one, demonstrated an approach to the capital’s ideal of collectivist methods of creative work to the best of its ability and production capabilities. But it was far from the capital’s scope.” (Muratov, 2010). “Artists also painted sketches in Novosibirsk itself. Many were attracted by the construction of a grand opera house building, surrounded by wooden village-type houses that had not yet been dismantled... The involvement of Novosibirsk artists in the implementation of the new project was not planned; only auxiliary work could be left to them. Shchusev’s workshop gave all the main work to specialists from Moscow. “(Muratov, 2010). “Artists from Novosibirsk actively worked as designers of buildings, columns of demonstrators, Honor Boards, stands dedicated to some event. There were two main political holidays: May Day and November Seventh. But there was also the New Year, the arrival of representatives of the party and government in Novosibirsk, the congresses of the Soviets. The artists’ design work never ended. The cooperative society “Artist”, oriented primarily towards design work, was very useful in these conditions. Although all the artists of Novosibirsk took work in the cooperative and for many this work became their main job, because it was paid more or less…” (Muratov, 2010).

3.1 “Nastoyashchee” [“Current”]

A brilliant witness of the 1920-1930s in Novosibirsk is the magazine “Current”, published here. Having emerged already at the end of the relative freedom of creativity and competition of stylistic groups in the USSR, the “half-magazine, half-newspaper” (Yarantsev, 2008a) managed to truthfully reflect not only many aspects of life in the then regional center, but also to show the intensity of passions in the cultural environment of the emerging metropolis, the environment that was formed for the most part around this and another well-known magazine “Sibirskie Ogni”. The struggle within the editorial boards, as well as the change in the authorities’ policy regarding creative associations, led to the rapid closure of the more popular illustrated and “rebellious” magazine “Current”, which existed from February 1928 to January 1930. While the always politically “verified” “Sibirskie Ogni” has gone through many political storms and has existed to this day for more than 100 years. In this study, we are mainly interested in the artistic component of the printed publication, its design, illustrations, and since “Sibirskie Ogni” did not attach much importance to this, printing only literary texts without illustrations, we will focus mainly on the design of the magazine “Current”, although it is impossible to ignore the political component of any publication of that time. The avant-garde orientation of the magazine is revealed by the editorial manifesto published in the pilot issue of 1928, stylistically consonant with the first manifesto of the Futurists, published by Filippo Tomaso Marinetti in the newspaper “Figaro” in 1909. “Current” was a half-magazine, half-newspaper, nothing more than an experiment that was not destined to exist for long. This experimentalism, diversity of color, convergence of opposites were reflected already in the first issue of “Current”, published on February 1, 1928. A kind of locomotive, a dynamo machine, which gave the start of the magazine speed and energy, was the manifesto of the “Current”, published on the first page: “We want to reflect those facts that must be reflected as an attack of the enemy. We want to influence, and not sing. To make and remake life, and not to decorate it with touching poems and tender postcards of views.”

It would seem that “Current” group was a repetition of LEF (Left Front of the Arts), as evidenced by the principle of the “literature of fact”. But, decisively rejecting identification with the group of V. Mayakovsky, V. Shklovsky and O. Brik, the “Current” were not “pure” adherents of either the “rodovtsy”-”napostovtsy”, or RAPP, and even less so of “poputnichestvo”. As a result, the publications of “Current” contained and were evident elements (“fragments”) of different approaches to the depiction of life and man, a kind of diffusion, drifting between the “living man” of RAPP, the “real man” of the “fellow travelers” and the hard-nosed proletariat of the “napostovtsy”. In search of their own direction, the “Current” came to an intermediate type of “reconstructed man” (Yarantsev, 2008a).

Vladimir Yarantsev in his article ““Current” - a Journal of Unfulfilled Hopes”, published in the journal “Sibirskie Ogni” No. 4, 2008, calls “Current” “one of the noisiest, but most distinctive journals of early Soviet history” and analyzes mainly the literary component of the publication. “Current” found itself in an even more difficult situation than LEF. Novosibirsk apologists for the proletarian spirit in life, politics, literature (literature was in first place for the “presenters”, as evidenced by a special literary issue in February 1929) found themselves between four main literary opponents: 1) LEF, 2) RAPP, 3) FOSP - “fellow travelers” and A. Voronsky, 4) the “old” “napostovskie” and S. Rodov, who found himself in the minority in the struggle with RAPP and L. Averbakh. However, the “Current” took something from each of them: 1) the principle of “literature of fact”, 2) the depiction of a “living person”, 3) an emphasis on artistry, 4) priority in the depiction of the proletariat” (Yarantsev, 2008b).

Left movements in literature and fine arts were closely intertwined at that time. Therefore, Yarantsev, analyzing the illustrated magazine, cannot remain silent about the artists. Moreover, the magazine itself published letters from readers who often had a negative attitude towards the works of illustrators, although they were far from the extreme trends of the left avant-garde of that time, such as Malevich, Rodchenko, Kandinsky, etc. “The artist Stepan Lipin, illustrator of “Current” tried to explain to the readers of the magazine the artistic techniques of modern graphics: “Everything put into them (the drawings. - V. Ya.) is not an ad lib or originality, or grimaces, but a search for new forms to express reality” (Lipin, 1928a). But in vain: even the “fans” of “Current” including the capital’s “LEF members,” did not accept the illustrations of the talented artists of the magazine. …The author found the “factual” “knowledge of people” not class-based, but living, not poster-like, but graphically “drawn”, almost caricature-like. This was evident in the ban on literary “drawing” in the work of the artists-illustrators of “Current”. In essence, these were not illustrations, but “texts” that had to be read as a work of art – emotionally and intellectually. Which the simple proletarian readers immediately found difficult and deliberate” (Yarantsev, 2008b).

Stepan Lipin's article in the magazine "Current", in which he tries to convey the position of his colleagues to the poorly educated public of the Siberian hinterland, was called "Are We Futurists?": "Is it true that art does not need explanations? Incorrect. Art certainly needs explanations, especially for the proletarians who have not learned to understand art and have seen little real art at all... We do not yet consider it necessary to tell our reader about the various trends in art designated by words that end in "ism". A little later, when we feel that our reader is interested in this, we will talk about the various "isms". For now, we will only say that, although we call ourselves futurists (futurism is a thing of the past for us), we know that futurism played a positive role in art. Futurism was a bourgeois movement, but a progressive one, because it understood the role of industry, the role of the city, and introduced industrial-urban elements into art. This was very unpleasant for the artists of the old type, who could not understand the role of the city and industry…" (Lipin, 1928b).

Thus, on behalf of Novosibirsk artists collaborating with the magazine "Current", Lipin explains their position as representatives of progressive avant-garde trends in art, heirs of futurism, opposing themselves to "artists of the old type" (Fig. 1). Lipin's associates collaborating with the magazine rather played the role of illustrators of literary and journalistic texts, and their graphics, although not academically realistic, were quite figurative and far from the extreme avant-garde delights of that time, striving for abstraction and non-objectivity. Some of these artists rather gravitated towards the graphic school of Favorsky, especially since his student at VKHUTEMAS, Natalia Nagorskaya, lived in Novosibirsk at that time and was close to this group. The editorial board of the magazine, headed by the editor-in-chief A. Kurs, was always distinguished by a radically leftist politicized position, which ultimately led to a confrontation not only with former fellow writers from "Sibirsky Ogni", but also with the undoubted capital authority Maxim Gorky, and then to the condemnation and closure of the magazine.

Figure 1. Cover of the magazine "Nastoyashchee" ["Current"] No. 4-5. 1928. Author A. Nikulin.

Since the 1930s, support for avant-garde trends in the USSR has become dangerous. This continued until the death of I. V. Stalin in 1953. But even then, despite Khrushchev's "thaw", it is known that the country's leadership continued to deny any art except socialist realism. It is curious that some influence of the avant-garde of the 1920s was preserved even in educational institutions. We, students of the architectural faculty of the Novosibirsk Civil Engineering Institute named after V. V. Kuibyshev in 1975-1980, in the curriculum, along with the academic washing of classical orders, also mastered the construction of abstract volumetric compositions in the spirit of

VKHUTEMAS (Fig. 2). It should be noted that among our teachers at that time, the radical avant-garde architect N. S. Kuzmin was still working at the university. Thus, during the "era of stagnation" in architectural pedagogy, two opposing methods coexisted: academicism and the Russian avant-garde of the 1920s. It must be admitted that such tolerance was allowed only in the field of architecture. At that time, the works of V.E. Khazanova (Khazanova, 1970), S.O. Khan-Magomedov and others were freely available for sale. In other forms of art, all sorts of –isms were decisively condemned at all levels.

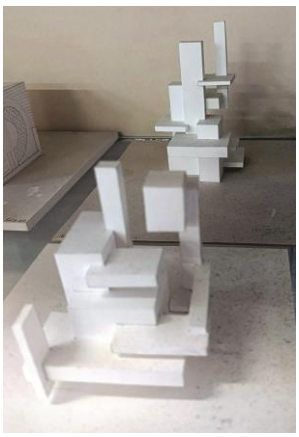

Figure 2. Student exercises on the topic of non-objective volumetric construction. Authors unknown.

In the Soviet Union, stylistic preferences in art were often dictated by political conjuncture. Having secured the support of the authorities in the person of A.V. Lunacharsky and D.P. Shterenberg, as well as the security forces of the Cheka-NKVD, the avant-garde artists of the 1920s aggressively tried with all their might and means to introduce their methodology into fine art, architecture and design planning, art education as the only correct one according to the method of the victorious dictatorship of the proletariat. How fierce the struggle between representatives of different stylistic trends was, we can see from the publications in the press of that time. One of the striking examples of this is a critical article in the magazine "SA" on an enthusiastic publication about the architecture of Novosibirsk in the December issue of the magazine "Nash Soyuz" for 1926: "In the magazine "Nash Soyuz" we see an entire article dedicated to the new capital of Siberia, where many loud words are said about the NEW appearance of this city, where millions of rubles spent, or rather, wasted on this construction are mentioned, where it is even said that "most of the buildings are maintained in the spirit of constructivism", but where in essence - we refer the reader to the photographs placed here - the most crude, poorly executed, eclectic rubbish of bad taste and quality." (Our reality, 1927) (Fig. 3).

Figure 3. Article "Our Reality" in the magazine "SA" No. 2. 1927.

The avant-garde's initial alignment with state ideologies (e.g., Lunacharsky's patronage) later conflicted with Stalinist cultural policies, leading to suppression. The 1930s turned into a 180-degree turn in the authorities' taste preferences. Former favorites in art and architecture were forced to either renounce their beliefs or remain unclaimed,

forgotten and rejected, and therefore without funds. Regardless of their future fate, their work, theory and practice were closed to the public for decades. At the same time, they all sincerely believed that they were working for the future, that they were at the forefront of human development. Of course, such a combination of circumstances contributed to the Russian avant-garde going "underground", and its character turned from major to depressive. Each new change of leader in the country gave temporary hope for renewal in the field of art. This was the case during Khrushchev's "thaw", and then during Gorbachev's "perestroika", which we had the chance to witness. At this time, in the 1980s, the forgotten Russian avant-garde of the early 20th century seemed to shine again with fresh colors (Fig. 4).

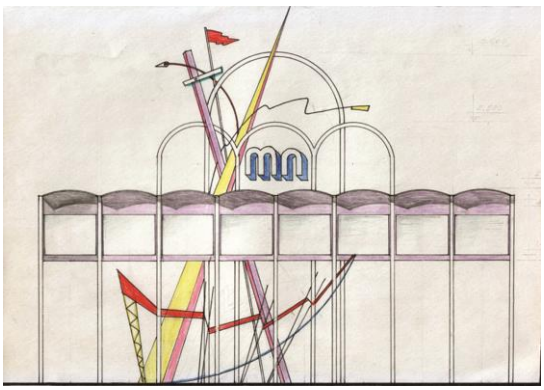

Figure 4. Project of a stand for the newspaper "Moscow News" in Pervomaisky Square in Novosibirsk. Author: Kurilov V.N. 1989.

3.2 El Lissitzky

Novosibirsk turned out to be closely connected with Lissitzky's work by force of circumstances. And the main circumstance was the Second World War. The fact is that in 1944 the artist's widow of German origin, Sophie Lissitzky-Kuppers, was exiled here with her fourteen-year-old son Ian. Having been associated with art and artists all her life, Sophie, even in such emergency circumstances, took some of the paintings from their home collection with her into exile. In 1947, seventeen-year-old Ian illegally arrived at his parents' Moscow apartment, "collected all of his father's things that remained in Moscow: sketches, watercolors, drafts, notes, and books – put them in two boxes, and sent them by freight train. They arrived safely in Novosibirsk." (Prior, 2016). In Novosibirsk, Ian introduced himself by the Russian name Boris. Here, in Novosibirsk, Sophie wrote a book about El Lissitzky. "This luxuriously published book, which would have pleased Lissitzky himself, was published by the Dresden publishing house "Iskusstvo" and enjoyed great success in German artistic circles; it was subsequently translated into English and sold in America. But even by the eightieth birthday of El Lissitzky in 1970, a Russian edition had not appeared. Incidentally, this book has not been translated into Russian to this day." (Prior, 2016). In fact, the book was translated into Russian by Ian Lissitzky in the 1960s, possibly soon after it was written. The manuscript of the translation is still kept in the S.N. Balandin Museum of Siberian Architecture (Pivkin, 1967). But the Russian edition has never appeared. It is worth noting that the Dresden publishing house's book in German was sold in Novosibirsk at the House of Books, and we, being students of the architecture faculty, bought it. It was a little strange that we bought books about Soviet artists in foreign languages, but soon it became a habit, because at that time books about some artists were not published in Russian at all. However, the publication of the book showed that interest in the Soviet avant-garde was growing not only in the socialist camp (and in the GDR in particular), but also in the West. A real hunt began for the works of Lissitzky. This detective story is colorfully described in the book by Ingeborg Prior, "Sophie's Testament. From Hanover to Siberia. The Tragic Story of Sophie Lissitzky-Küppers and Her Stolen Paintings." "When Sophie was working on a book about El Lissitzky in 1965, she provided the publishing house "Art" with a number of private photographs and original works by Lissitzky. They remained in Germany, in the publisher's archive." (Prior, 2016). The fact is quite curious: if the Soviet state allowed the originals of Lissitzky's works to be freely exported abroad, it means that they were not considered works of art (now art historians say that not a single original of El Lissitzky remains in Russia). When Ian was finally able to obtain permission to leave the country for permanent residence, "He found El Lissitzky's works safe and sound in the archives of a former East

German publishing house, and no one interfered with him when he decided to take them." (Prior, 2016). Relations with the Gmurzynska Gallery in Cologne, the Van Abbe Museum in Eindhoven, and Betty Beck from Bremen were not so smooth. Sophie and Ian willingly provided representatives of these galleries with Lissitzky's works for exhibitions, which were then irretrievably lost to the legal heirs of his work.

We know about these exhibitions in the West, but the El Lissitzky exhibition in Novosibirsk, which took place in the House of Scientists of Akademgorodok from December 3, 1967 to January 15, 1968, was completely forgotten. On the wave of the "thaw", Siberian architects S.N. Balandin and V.M. Pivkin managed to hold this exhibition before the avant-garde artist's works sailed away from Novosibirsk to Moscow or the West forever, and Novosibirsk art lovers were the first to see them after a long period of persecution of the avant-garde in the Soviet Union. The reason for this was the close acquaintance and friendship of Sergei Balandin and Boris (Jan) Lissitzky, who happened to be teenagers on the same school bench. The ambitious exhibition project of the two Siberian architects irritated their Moscow colleagues, and for good reason, because they overlooked one of the leading representatives of the Russian avant-garde of the 1920s and gave the exhibition priority to the distant provincial city of Novosibirsk. This irritation is clearly visible in the correspondence (both official and personal) between V.M. Pivkin and Yu.S. Yaralov, secretary of the Central Board of the Union of Architects of the USSR in Moscow (Pivkin, 1967). The fact is that after Novosibirsk, the exhibition was planned to be shown in Moscow and then in Leningrad. For this event, the Siberians proposed to the Central Board of the Union of Architects of the USSR to publish articles written by each of them about Lissitzky's work in the capital's magazines: S.N. Balandin "L. Lissitzky and his architectural theory" in "Soviet architecture", and V.M. Pivkin "L.M. Lissitzky. Biographical Notes" in "Architecture of the USSR". As can be seen from the correspondence, Muscovites categorically opposed these publications, obviously trying to hide from the public the involvement of Novosibirsk residents in organizing this exhibition. The Novosibirsk exhibition presented 183 works by L. M. Lisitsky. The expenses for organizing and holding the exhibition were covered by the Picture Gallery of the Siberian Branch of the USSR Academy of Sciences (House of Scientists of Akademgorodok).

In the 21st century, interest in the Russian avant-garde of the 1920s is reawakening in Novosibirsk. With the support of business, the Siberian Center for Contemporary Art (SCCA) and the Siberian Center for the Promotion of Architecture (SCSA) are created, where the idea of holding a competition dedicated to El Lissitzky matures. And such a competition was held. The competition was called "The Worlds of El Lissitzky". True, it did not advance beyond the first stage. But this stage was very representative, 184 projects from 42 countries took part in it. The results of the international competition were summed up in 2013 with the release of a catalog, where the first place was awarded to Gabor Stark from the United Kingdom for a project called "Black Currency. Portable Monument", which is a "nomad's talisman" - a plate of black steel of irregular geometric shape with a hole that fits in the palm of an adult (The worlds of El Lissitzky, 2013). This was perhaps the most original portable and economical project, although it did not meet the main condition of the competition as an object of the urban environment of the city of Novosibirsk (Fig. 5).

Figure 5. Winner of "Worlds of El Lissitzky" competition, Gabor Stark, project entitled "Black Currency. Portable Monument". 2013.

Many other projects differed in the degree of citation of motifs from Lissitzky's diverse work and were intended to be placed in the urban environment with varying degrees of originality and appropriateness (correspondence) to

the surrounding landscape (Fig. 6). Significant funds were invested in holding the competition, but it was not widely popular among the population and aroused cautious interest from specialists.

Figure 6. A project by Adela Antico (Spain), one of the participants in the "Worlds of El Lissitzky" competition, entitled "Landmark". 2013.

But the avant-garde theme emerged, was picked up by other enthusiasts and became fashionable. Thus, in 2019, a new organization called "Novo-Sibirsk. Constructivism" announced itself with an exhibition and lecture show, created with the grant support of a charitable foundation and having an educational and commercial nature. For several years, the organization has been holding a number of exhibition projects, created a network of excursion routes, published a number of printed publications dedicated to the cultural heritage of Novosibirsk, including the avant-garde of the 1920s (Fig. 7).

Figure 7. Poster for one of the events of "the Novo-Sibirsk. Constructivism" center in the October Revolution Palace of Culture. Author: Tatyana Shabalina. 2020.

The core of the organization, consisting of several people, gathers a certain number of volunteers for public events, including university students. One of our students has been cooperating with this company for several years, sometimes offering educational projects for implementation in this structure. One such project, executed in the style of constructivism of the early 20th century, was the perpetual calendar, consisting of three red volumetric rings superimposed on the plan of the House of Science and Culture designed by A.Z. Grinberg, T.Ya. Bardt and M.I. Kurilko (Fig. 8). At the Novosibirsk State University of Architecture, Design and Arts, we pay sufficient attention to the

study of the Russian avant-garde of the early 20th century. This is the subject of our course of lectures for master's students about VKHUTEMAS-VKHUTEIN and the influence of these educational institutions on Novosibirsk of that time, as well as presentations for bachelors in the disciplines of "Identity in Communication Design", "Course Design", "Art of Font" and others with the execution of graphic works in the corresponding style (Fig. 9). Thus, the traditions of the university are preserved and developed, constant research, study and education in the field of this phenomenon are taking place at the university level. Which bears fruit.

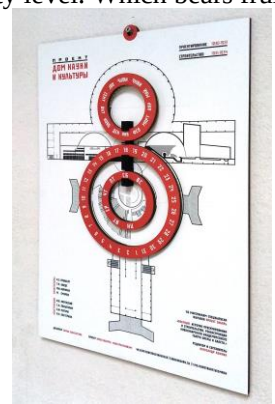

Figure 8. Perpetual calendar. Project of student Sofia Shangareeva. Supervisor: Professor V.N. Kurilov. 2024.

Figure 9. Academic project of a poster for the celebration of the 125th anniversary of Novosibirsk by student E.M. Murzina. Supervisor: Professor V.N. Kurilov. 2018.

It is worth noting the great influence of the Russian avant-garde of the 1920s on the work of contemporary artists and designers in Novosibirsk. The widely celebrated 125th anniversary of the city in 2018 was remembered for the festive decoration of the city in the spirit of constructivism of the early 20th century (Fig. 10) (Novosibirsk is 125 years old! 2018).

Figure 10. Bilbrod for the 125th anniversary of Novosibirsk. Branding agency "March". 2018.

The influence of the avant-garde has now become a trend for various advertising printed materials and in urban

outdoor advertising. Sometimes, modern exhibition projects based on the avant-garde of the 1920s, thanks to the efforts of Novosibirsk gallery owners, take on a shocking sarcastic character that the fathers of this avant-garde would hardly have liked. Thus, in 2021, Novosibirsk hosted the exhibition "El-130!", dedicated to the artist's anniversary. It did not include a single work by the hero of the day, but it featured competition entries from 2013, "The Worlds of El Lissitzky", as well as video art by contemporary artists inspired by the work of the great avant-garde artist, and computer graphics, mostly fooling around with Lissitzky's famous poster "Beat the Whites with the Red Wedge!" (Fig. 11). It is no coincidence that, as the press noted, "the artist's great-granddaughter published a post on her social networks the day before saying that she was a little afraid to go to the exhibition." (Fomenko, 2021). In the summer of 2024, most of the exhibits from this exhibition were displayed at the White Gallery in Novosibirsk.

Figure 11. Fragment of the exposition of the exhibition "El-130". Exhibition center "CK19". 2021. Photo by the author.

3.3 Conclusions

We have traced the influence of the Russian avant-garde on the culture of Novosibirsk over the course of a century. It was direct. In different periods, it influenced the tastes of the city's population to varying degrees, but it always found interest and attention, albeit a small part of its cultural part, even during periods of disgrace and prohibitions. It is thanks to the efforts of these individuals from the creative intelligentsia that the memory of that turbulent and contradictory era and its achievements have been preserved to this day. We are beginning to appreciate the significance of these achievements only now, a century later. Meanwhile, they are quite significant. Modern architecture, design, painting and graphics bear very recognizable features of the Russian avant-garde of the early 20th century, not only in Russia, but throughout the world. It is noteworthy that Novosibirsk, at that time a small provincial town lost in the snows of Siberia, was not on the sidelines and still remains involved in this significant phenomenon.

While contemporary Novosibirsk celebrates the avant-garde through exhibitions like El-130! such projects risk reducing its legacy to superficial aesthetics. Rodchenko's 1920 lament about 'blindness' to new forms underscores the need for deeper engagement with avant-garde theories rather than stylistic mimicry: "I am not talking about fantasy. No, but about "nature", we do not know how to find nature. Not even find, but see it in order to show it to others. In essence, we are simply blind and see only what has been passed down to us by generations. Any new "seen" causes a revolution" (Rodchenko, 2025).

It is a paradox, but sometimes years of oblivion allow artifacts to be preserved in greater purity and integrity than periods of fashion for them. The widespread direct citation of the avant-garde of the early 20th century in painting, design and architecture has now become too intrusive. It is even stranger when today's artists and gallery owners pass off their interpretations of discoveries in painting and graphics more than a century ago as fresh avant-garde only because they are non-objective.

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