

***The Power of Pictures:
Early Soviet Photography, Early Soviet Film***
Presented at the Jewish Museum in New York
September 25, 2015 – February 7, 2016

**Striking Soviet Avant-Garde Photographs and Film
from the Revolution through the 1930s
Highlight Art's Impact on Social Change and
Radical Political Engagement**

New York, NY – From early vanguard constructivist works by Alexander Rodchenko and El Lissitzky, to the modernist images of Arkady Shaikhet and Max Penson, Soviet photographers played a pivotal role in the history of modern photography. *The Power of Pictures: Early Soviet Photography, Early Soviet Film* will examine how photography, film, and poster art were harnessed to disseminate Communist ideology, revisiting a moment in history when artists acted as engines of social change and radical political engagement. Covering the period from the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution through the 1930s, the exhibition will explore how early modernist photography and film influenced a new Soviet style while energizing and expanding the nature of the media. Through 181 works, *The Power of Pictures* will reveal how striking images by master photographers and filmmakers were seen as powerful propaganda tools in the new Soviet Union. Their shared radical aesthetic in a moment of profound social transformation will also be examined. Looking at photography and film together as influential and formally related media, the exhibition will be on view at the Jewish Museum from September 25, 2015 through February 7, 2016. Following its New York showing, *The Power of Pictures: Early Soviet Photography, Early Soviet Film* will travel to two other venues.

"The innovations of early Soviet lens-based art are remarkably relevant—even prescient—for our contemporary moment," said Jens Hoffmann, Deputy Director, Exhibitions and Public Programs, the Jewish Museum. "In a time when the relationship between art and politics is ill defined, it is opportune to look back at a period of enormous synergy between artistic creation and extreme political action."

In a country where 70% of the population was illiterate, heavily illustrated periodicals and film were considered more effective tools than the written word for the propaganda needs of the Bolsheviks in the 1920s. Lenin himself declared that the camera, as much as the gun, was an important weapon in class struggle. Recognizing that images had the power to transform society, Lenin put lens-based art at the service of the Revolution – thereby acting as a historical demonstration of how artistic and political ambitions can coalesce and fortify one another. *The Power of Pictures* will illustrate that these photographs and films encompassed a much wider range of artistic styles and thematic content than previously recognized. Through the lens of its most outstanding practitioners, the exhibition will consider the history and culture of the former Soviet Union covering the period from the Revolution to the end of the 1930s. By including works produced by Oktyabr (October) and the Russian Association of Proletarian Photographers (ROPF), the exhibition will examine the differences and similarities of these respective groups of photographers who defined Soviet style of the period.

The Power of Pictures highlights major constructivist photographers Alexander Rodchenko, El Lissitzky, and Boris Ignatovich, whose work was presented in landmark exhibitions of the time. Such photographers influenced photojournalists such as Arkady Shaikhet, Max Penson, Eleazar Langman, and Georgy Zelma – the majority of whom were Jewish. Modernist photography in the Soviet Union developed alongside the avant-garde. Toward the end of the 1920s and beginning of the 1930s, it had started to acquire features brought about by the ideological requirements of the authorities, who specified that every artwork promote a political and social agenda, and reflect a Socialist Realist style.

The exhibition will include twelve films by major directors of the era, such as the seminal Sergei Eisenstein film, *Battleship Potemkin*, and *Man With a Movie Camera* by Dziga Vertov. Despite Eisenstein and Vertov's relative fame, many of these filmmakers such as Grigory Kozintsev and Yakov Protazanov have been overlooked or excised from the history of the medium. Films to be shown in the exhibition include: *Aelita: Queen of Mars*, directed by Yakov Protazanov, 1924; *Battleship Potemkin*, directed by Sergei Eisenstein, 1925; *By the Law, or Dura Lex*, directed by Lev Kuleshov, 1926; *The Fall of the Romanov Dynasty*, directed by Esfir Shub, 1927; *The House on Trubnaya*, directed by Boris Barnet, 1928; *Man with a Movie Camera*, directed by Dziga Vertov, 1929; *Mother*, directed by Vsevolod Pudovkin, 1926; *October, or Ten Days That Shook the World*, directed by Sergei Eisenstein, 1927; *The Overcoat*, directed by Grigory Kozintsev, 1926; *Salt for Svanetia*, directed by Mikhail Kalatozov, 1930; *Storm over Asia*, directed by Vsevolod Pudovkin, 1928; and *Turksib*, directed by Viktor Turin, 1929. The films will be screened in their entirety on a weekly schedule during the run of the exhibition. A screening schedule can be found on the Museum's website at <http://bit.ly/PowerOfPicturesFilms>.

In addition, *The Power of Pictures* will feature a rich array of film posters and vintage publications which integrate photography. Employing a radical graphic style, these posters reflect the utopian ideals and rigorous experimental aesthetics which were applied to the many modes of creative endeavor during the early Soviet era. Also on view will be examples of periodicals in which major photographic works were published to convey the impact of photojournalism as a powerful propaganda tool. Extreme color and dynamic geometric designs, combined with a highly innovative use of collage and photomontage, give these images a contemporary appeal. Nearly a century after many of these works were created, they still convey a fresh and revelatory sensibility.

The exhibition at the Jewish Museum will explore the work of the most prominent photographers and filmmakers of the period, and demonstrate that early Soviet photography, film, and poster art encompassed a much wider range of style and content than previously known in the West. These vanguard artists were determined to define a new style, and use the inherent potential of the medium to energize and expand the very nature of photography.

Initially, the Communist government encouraged the avant-garde. Radical style was seen as the expression of radical politics. For a time, artistic invention operated in potent and fruitful synergy with activism. Photographers and filmmakers were urged to try unusual techniques: collage, montage, darkroom manipulation, unconventional camera angles, fast-pace editing, and shifts in depth of field allowed the viewer to experience a familiar reality from



an unfamiliar perspective.

A large number of the most prominent photographers, photojournalists, and filmmakers were Jewish; as members of a recently emancipated minority, they welcomed the arrival of the Soviet Union, with its promise of a new, egalitarian world.

The period of intense innovation was brief. By 1932, as Joseph Stalin consolidated power, independent styles were no longer tolerated; the avant-garde itself became suspect. Artistic organizations were dissolved and replaced by state-run unions. Art was subject to strict state control, and required to promote an approved, idealized socialist agenda.

The exhibition is organized by Susan Tumarkin Goodman, Senior Curator Emerita, and Jens Hoffmann, Deputy Director, Exhibitions and Public Programs, both at the Jewish Museum.

Exhibition Tour: The Jewish Museum, New York City (9/25/15–2/7/16); Frist Center for the Visual Arts, Nashville, TN (3/11/16–7/4/16); and Joods Historisch Museum, Amsterdam, Netherlands (7/24/16–11/27/16).

Exhibition Catalogue

In conjunction with the exhibition, the Jewish Museum, New York, and Yale University Press are publishing a 240-page catalogue by Susan Tumarkin Goodman and Jens Hoffmann, with an essay by Alexander Lavrentiev. Alexander Lavrentiev is a Moscow-based art historian, grandson of the photographer Alexander Rodchenko, and Director of the Rodchenko–Stepanova archive. Featuring 148 color and 30 black and white illustrations, the hardcover book is available worldwide and at the Jewish Museum's Cooper Shop for \$45.00.

Audio Tour

Produced by the Jewish Museum in association with Acoustiguide, a random access audio guide has been created for *The Power of Pictures: Early Soviet Photography, Early Soviet Film* featuring an introduction by Claudia Gould, Helen Goldsmith Menschel Director of the Jewish Museum, and Jens Hoffmann. Tour commentary is provided by Jens Hoffmann; Susan Tumarkin Goodman; David Shneer, the Louis P. Singer Chair in Jewish History at the University of Colorado, Boulder; and Alexander Lavrentiev, Professor at the Moscow State Stroganov Academy of Applied Arts and Design, who is also Alexander Rodchenko's grandson. The audio tour will be available to museum visitors for \$5.00, and as a free downloadable app for iOS and Android.

Related Public Programs

The Jewish Museum will be presenting public programs in conjunction with *The Power of Pictures* exhibition including a concert, film screenings followed by discussions, gallery talks, and more. Highlights include: an October 29 panel featuring artists Andrea Bowers, Sharon Hayes, and Shuddhabrata Sengupta, with moderator Nato Thompson, Chief Curator, Creative Time, considering how art and politics have evolved together since the early 20th century; and *Bang on a Can: The Power of Pictures*, a November 5 concert featuring bassist Robert Black anchoring a program of chamber music by experimental Soviet composers.



Press Preview

A press preview will take place on Monday, September 21, 2015 from 10am to 1pm with remarks at 10:30am. Those interested in attending can RSVP to pressoffice@thejm.org.

Support

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List of Artists in Exhibition:

Photographers:

Boris Ignatovich
Elizaveta Ignatovich
Olga Ignatovich
Yakov Khalip
Eleazar Langman
El Lissitzky
Moisei Nappelbaum
Max Penson
Georgy Petrusov
Alexander Rodchenko
Arkady Shaikhet
Georgy Zelma
Georgy Zimin

Filmmakers:

Boris Barnet
Sergei Eisenstein
Mikhail Kalatozov
Grigory Kozintsev
Lev Kuleshov
Yakov Protazanov
Vsevolod Pudovkin
Esfir Shub
Viktor Turin
Dziga Vertov

About the Jewish Museum

Located on Museum Mile at Fifth Avenue and 92nd Street, the Jewish Museum is one of the world's preeminent institutions devoted to exploring art and Jewish culture from ancient to contemporary, offering intellectually engaging, educational, and provocative exhibitions and programs for people of all ages and backgrounds. The Museum was established in 1904, when Judge Mayer Sulzberger donated 26 ceremonial objects to The Jewish Theological Seminary



as the core of a museum collection. Today, the Museum maintains a collection of over 30,000 works of art, artifacts, and broadcast media reflecting global Jewish identity, and presents a diverse schedule of internationally acclaimed temporary exhibitions.

The Jewish Museum is located at 1109 Fifth Avenue at 92nd Street, New York City. Museum hours are Saturday, Sunday, Monday, and Tuesday, 11am to 5:45pm; Thursday, 11am to 8pm; and Friday, 11am to 4pm. Museum admission is \$15.00 for adults, \$12.00 for senior citizens, \$7.50 for students, free for visitors 18 and under and Jewish Museum members. Admission is Pay What You Wish on Thursdays from 5pm to 8pm and free on Saturdays. For information on The Jewish Museum, the public may call 212.423.3200 or visit the website at TheJewishMuseum.org.

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