UTOPIA DYSTOPIA REVISITED

CURATED BY YUKO SHIRAISHI

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UTOPIA/DYSTOPIA REVISITED

by Yuko Shiraishi

In John Carey's *The Faber Book of Utopias* published in 2000, he explains that Utopia means 'nowhere' or 'no-place'. Utopia has tended to be taken to mean a good place, but strictly speaking imaginary good places and imaginary bad places are all Utopias or 'nowheres'.

I have always been interested in the subject of Utopia and Dystopia, but the key inspiration for this exhibition has been the work of Ivan Leonidov, which I discovered through reading Akiko Honda's *Astroarchitecture: Ivan Leonidov and Unrealized Architectural Projects in the USSR between 1920s-1950s* (2014).

Leonidov has been unkindly treated by history. Apart from a small number of sketches and paintings, little of his work survives. Nor does anything remain by way of notes or commentaries he may have written. He is therefore presented here as a forgotten presence, an architect who never existed, an intriguing ghost from the past. By inviting him into this exhibition, my hope has been to re-open a window onto the meaning of Utopia / Dystopia such as Leonidov experienced in Russia and the Soviet Union.

During the 1920s, Leonidov argued, as a member of the Constructivist movement, that architecture had to adopt alternative perspectives through which to view the world. He explored new forms of media such as film and photography in the development of a methodology that Honda has called *Astroarchitecture*. This led him to extend the idea of the bird's-eye view to the 'view of an astronaut', which he used in his later years to design imaginary landscapes and cityscapes. His drawings often incorporated illustrations of the aeroplanes and airships from which he imagined his aerial views were taken.

This exhibition is less about architecture by architects as about ways in which practitioners working in a range of different media think about and address architecture in their work. Tadashi Kawamata, Richard Wilson, Kathy Prendergast, Mike Nelson, Alison Turnbull, Ben Rivers, Gary Woodley and Mariana Bisti are all contemporary artists, many of whom have been involved in architectural projects during their careers. David Greene, a member of the Archigram group, and the late Frederick Kiesler are both architect/artists whose interests resonate(d) closely with those of Leonidov.

Arata Isozaki has recently written about what he believes is the end of the road that Utopian building projects have come to. He and Terunobu Fujimori are currently proposing the idea of Art Architecture, meaning art born from or created through architecture. This is a little different, I think, from artists' understanding of what architecture means.

Although Leonidov was an architect, he built almost nothing during his lifetime. Important contemporaries of his included Gustav Klucis, El Lissitzky, Kasimir Malevich, László Moholy-Nagy, Liubov Popova and Georges Vantongerloo. Works by these artists are included in the exhibition as a way of contextualising the period in which Leonidov was active.

In contrast to Russian Cosmism, Italian Futurism and its Aeropittura were concerned principally with technology and speed. Representations of aircraft by Russian avant-garde artists of the same period reflected an interest in the cosmos and what flight meant in terms of freedom from the earth and liberation from the force of gravity. The concern was less with physics and aeronautic engineering than with something more transcendental. Nikolai Fyodorov, an important member of the Cosmism movement up until his death in 1903, advocated the idea that pseudo-scientific methods that freed humanity from gravity could be used to create new, harmonious communities in space whose members would enjoy immortality.





This is the essence, it strikes me, of Russian Utopianism as reflected in the work of Leonidov. Release from the force of gravity is central to the work of Russian Constructivists such as Malevich, El Lissitzky and Tatlin. It is also apparent in the free floating figures one finds in Marc Chagall's paintings. The same is true of Ilya Khabakov's 1980s installation *The Man who Flew into Space from his Apartment*. And Andrei Tarkovsky's *Andrei Rublev* (1966) opens with a scene in which a man appears riding on a balloon made of animal skins. In the following scene the man falls out of the sky just like Icarus, at which point the true horror of reality is revealed to the hero Andrei. Thus begins his Dystopia. It is revealing that Fyodorov's fantastical writings were increasingly shunned after the Russian Revolution. I feel that this was probably to do with Communism's aspiration to create an actual Utopia on earth, and partly to do with the deep-rooted Russian belief in the idea of mother earth.

The Soviet Union was formed in 1922. Interestingly, this was immediately after Yevgeny Zamyatin completed his hugely influential Dystopian novel *We*. This was not published in Russian until 1988 but appeared in translation in many languages during the 1920s, including in English in 1924. In its fictional description of a totalitarian police state, it was a precursor of both Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932) and George Orwell's *1984* (1949). Zamyatin was a naval architect. This is reflected in the futuristic technological descriptions that feature throughout the book, the focus of which is the protagonist's struggle with his incurable affliction of having developed a 'soul'.

It strikes me that Russians have always been in search of purity, whether of the soul as in Dostoyevsky's *Idiot* or in the extremes with which they have articulated ideas about Utopia and Dystopia. This is different from what you find in the East, where things tend to be addressed in shades of grey.

Eastern philosophies are largely concerned with addressing everyday attachments and worries. To overcome these, wisdom, knowledge and intelligence are required. Even in the 21st century people rely on ancient wisdom such as that articulated in the *I Ching (The Book of Changes)*. The reason why Chinese politicians have traditionally not revealed their dates of birth is because of fears that competitors and enemies will know their weaknesses and periods of vulnerability.

Since the future is unreadable, Utopia means a world without anxieties. Immortality is another key issue, particularly in China. This is famously articulated in Tao Yuanming's *Record of the Peach Blossom* written in the early fifth century CE. Generally speaking people in Asia are superstitious. When things are bad, they stand back and reflect, waiting for the better times they know will follow.

The ideal society described by Thomas More in his *Utopia* (1516) is a well-structured entity built through the will and engagement of its people. This is quite different from what is found in the East, where Utopia is an idealised place to escape to from the harsh realities of the world. In Japan and Korea the desire to return to the womb is widespread. An interesting variation on this idea appears in Akutagawa Ryunosuke's 1927 *Kappa*. Near the beginning there is a description of how, just before birth, a *kappa* (a mythical river creature) is asked by its father shouting up its mother's vagina whether or not it wants to be born. If it says no, it is aborted.

The modern phenomena of the *otaku* (nerd or geek) and the *hikikomori* (someone who withdraws completely from society) can be explained as forms of 'wombism' or the creation of a small, personal universe which a person wants never to have to leave. This is the opposite of the grander scale Russian longing to escape from the forces of gravity. The prevalence

in Japan of capsule hotels is not just a matter of the cost of accommodation - it is also to do with the comfort derived from being cocooned in a womb-like space. A traditional version of a similarly confined space is the tea room, in which host and guests sit in close proximity to one another while enjoying drinking tea and composing poetry. The interior of a tea room is a magical space in which tension and relaxation co-exist.

Katsuhiro Otomo's epic Dystopian manga *Akira*, serialised between 1982 and 1990, was a Japanese and international sensation. An anime version was released in 1988. This was preceded in 1984 by Hayao Miyazaki's children's anime *Naosicaä Of the Valley of the Wind* in which he depicted a post-nuclear Dystopia. The 1960s and 1970s were the golden age of Japanese manga. This was followed by the flowering of Japanese anime, which took the world by storm during the 1980s. The subject matter of many of these two popular and influential formats were Utopias and Dystopias.

The background to this was Japan's unique experience of having seen Hiroshima and Nagasaki obliterated by atomic bombs, this followed by living under the shadow of hydrogen bomb tests conducted in the Pacific Ocean from the 1950s onwards. The horrors of nuclear destruction found expression in the birth of Godzilla in the 1954 film of the same title. A terrifying monster at first, Godzilla gradually turns into an ally of humans and an object of sympathy. This seminal film undoubtedly paved the way for Japanese children's fascination for the themes of Utopia and Dystopia. This is quite different from the children's world conceived by Walt Disney.

More recently, in 2011, there was a resurgence of fear about atomic power triggered by the accident at the Fukushima nuclear plant that followed the major earthquake off the northeast coast of Japan and the ensuing tidal wave. Whether the result of a bomb or an accident, nuclear radiation is a terrifying toxin that cannot be heard, seen or smelled. It is a reality that cannot be felt as a reality. The area around the Fukushima nuclear plant is now covered with endless arrays of storage tanks for radioactive water. There is no end in sight. It is a Dystopian nightmare created by a combination of natural forces and human activity.

The destruction of the environment caused by humans is one of the great issues of our time. It has not only triggered movements such as Extinction Rebellion, but has also presented itself as a major challenge for architects and city planners. Isozaki has written an intriguing if depressing analysis of the failure of so many of the Utopian projects that have been planned or undertaken since the late eighteenth century.

It is interesting in this respect that in the sixteenth century Thomas More envisaged the existence of a Utopian island – a 'New' Atlantis - in an as yet undiscovered part of the world. With Google Earth and other mapping technologies available to us today, we know that no such place exists. On the other hand, for better or for worse, the emergence of this kind of technology allows people to create virtual spaces and to lead lives detached from their actual physicality.

With the advent of AI, nanotechnology and genetic engineering, humanity is faced with ethical questions that many people believe have no answer. We have few if any adequate moral compasses to guide us, and while it seems on the surface that the world is functioning, we also sense that its core is rotten. The natural world and we who occupy it are sitting on a metaphorical volcano whose tremors we sense but whose destructive power we are unable to imagine. If people have always dreamed of Utopias, they have fantasised even more strongly about Dystopias.

Where are we going now?



Books

Ancient Egyptian Book of The Dead	(1550 BCE)
Account of the Peach Blossom Spring	(400CE) Tao Qian/Tao Yuanming
Republic	(360BCE) Plato
Utopia	(1516) Thomas More
Idiot	(1869) Fyodor Dostoyevsky
Time Machine	(1895) H. G. Wells
We	(1920) Yevgeny Zamyatin
The Trial	(1925) Franz Kafka
Kappa	(1927) Ryunosuke Akutagawa
Brave New World	(1932) Aldous Huxley
After Many a Summer	(1939) Aldous Huxley
Animal Farm	(1945) George Orwell
Ape and Essence	(1948) Aldous Huxley
Nineteen Eighty-Four	(1948) George Orwell
Fahrenheit 451	(1954) Ray Bradbury
Roadside Picnic	(1972) Arkady & Boris Strugatsky
Invisible Cities	(1972) Italo Calvino
Etienne-Louis Boullée (1728-1799) Theoretician of Revolutionary Architecture	(1974) Jean-Marie Pérouse de Montclos
The Doomed City (1988-89)	(1970-75) Arkady & Boris Strugatsky
A Large Number	(1976) Wislawa Szymborska
Akira	(1982-90) Katsuhiro Otomo
Marginal	(1985-87) Moto Hagio
Ivan Leonidov	(1988) Andrei Gozak & Andrei Leonidov
Lost Paradise	(1988) Daijiro Moroboshi
The Magic Flute	(1989) Bohumil Hrabal
Fourteen	(1990-1995) Kazuo Umezu
The Beach	(1996) Alex Garland
The Faber book of Utopia	(2000) John Carey
Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed	(2005) Jared Diamond
Extreme Metaphors	(2012) J.G.Ballard
Where is Utopia	(2013) Arata Isozaki
Astroarchitecture Ivan Leonidov and Unrealized Architectural Projects in the USSR between 1920s-1950s	(2014) Akiko Honda
The Future of the Mind: The Scientific Quest to Understand, Enhance, and Empower the Mind	(2014) Michio Kaku
Tea Ceremony Architecture	(2015) Arata Isozaki & Teronobu Fujimori
Homo Deus	(2015) Yuval Noah Harari
Brief Answers to Big Questions	(2018) Stephen Hawking

Films & Animations

Metropolis	(1927) Fritz Lang
Godzilla	(1954) Ishirou Honda
Andrei Rubley	(1962) Andrei Tarkovsky
Dr. Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb	(1964) Stanley Kubrick
Aguirre, the Wrath of God	(1972) Werner Herzog
Eraserhead	(1977) David Lynch
Stalker	(1979) Andrei Tarkovsky
Mad Max 2: The Road Warrior	(1981) George Miller
Bladerunner	(1982) Ridley Scott
Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind	(1984) Hayao Miyazaki
Akira	(1988) Katsuhiro Otomo





MARIANA BISTI

WÊNDÌNG FÁNRÓNG 2017
two channel 4k video

Made in Hong Kong, during a 10-week residency at the Academy of Visual Arts, Hong Kong Baptist University.

The principle that organises the official identity of Hong Kong under Chinese rule reads: “wěndìng fánróng” (stability & prosperity). In fact, there is a missing subtext that one can borrow from Robert Venturi’s seminal book on postmodern architecture: complexity & contradiction*. The latter two terms reveal the complementary foundations upon which the official Chinese discourse constructs the image of HK as an exuberant and thriving community. Yet contemporary HK is more than that: its complex and contradictory nature stems from its turbulent historical past, its colonisation and decolonisation, its re-nationalisation, the constant movement of goods and capital, the
social injustice and inequality, and above all, the perpetual movement of its people. This movement produces the political, cultural and social mix that generates a hybridised identity, with ephemeral foundations and fluid characteristics. HK’s contradictions and complexities are scribed on the body of its city, manifested in its urban landscape, in the organisation of working, living and public spaces. The city’s structural formations and functions encapsulate the spirit of its past, present and future, speak of its monstrosities and its miracles, uproot the official Chinese discourse and reveal a wealth of contradictions that constitute HK one of the most attractive and mesmerizing dystopias on earth.

*Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture, Robert Venturi, Moma, 1977.

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The 2-channel work is the first part of a trilogy of aerial video essays made in southeast Asia while undertaking residencies (‘IN TANDEM’ - Taipei, 2017, ‘The 14th Resolution’ - Kuala Lumpur, 2018). Taking cue from Henri Lefebvre’s bibliography on the social production and politics of space, alongside Guy Debord’s invented term “psychogeography”, these films can be described as urban ventures that explore and map the modes of organisation of social and cultural life, beyond the traditional modes of seeing, experiencing and interpreting the City, its history and the spatiality of its politics.
Exclusively filmed with a drone, perspectives are twisted and multiplied while new types of visuality arise through a disembodied and remote-controlled gaze, that wishes to provide ground for a double reflection, a broadened approach towards the ways of interpreting both the subject and the object of observation. Moreover, they wish to challenge the process of observation itself, for a more thorough understanding of our surroundings and, by extension, ourselves.

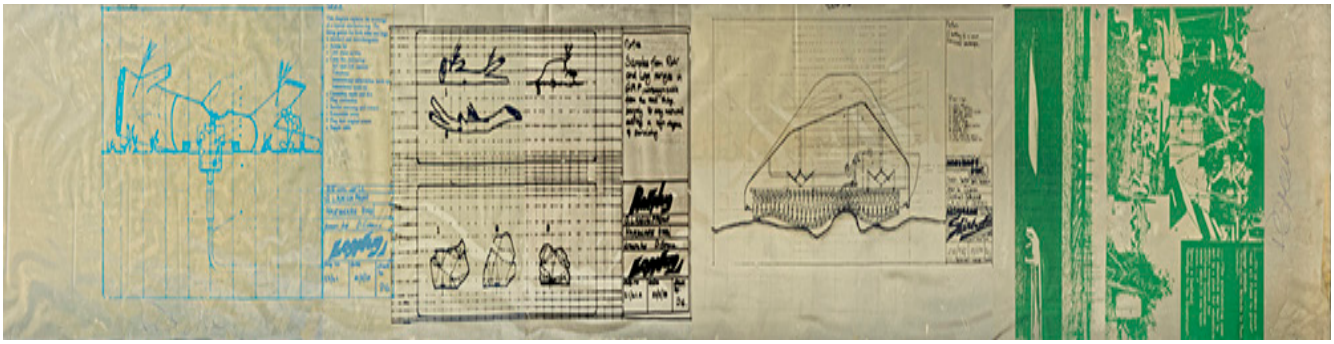


DAVID GREENE (ARCHIGRAM)

“Golden Roll”, Log-Plug & Roc-Plug 1969
Gold poster: silkscreen print on Gold Mylar
41.6 x 212 cm

Make of this silk screen what you will .
Just a ?
Are Log plug and Bottery places where everything is perfect ?
A harmony achieved by the perfect union between technology and nature , a new nature ? ,
Or perhaps a new nowhere with a smart phone ? A well serviced pastoral no place ?
Yet it suggests that the pastoral paradise of Poussin can now be inhabited by a new kind of peasant , where the internet is an extension of this new peasant’s nervous system , a nervous system that is in harmony with the new nature of the internet .A nature that these lines on gold ask you the say which is the real rock in ….?
I am looking at an engraving ‘Susanna and the Elders in a Garden ‘by Jan Van Londferseel ,
I am imagining that that Susanna’s victimisation beyond the copulating rabbits is replaced ,if that is the right word, by a group of more contemporary figures engaged in earthly pleasures but taking selfies .
In this utterly beautiful engraving log-plug asks you to recognise the real log without your smart-phone , or the real swan ?
All it asks you is next time you take a stroll in the country side ask yourself what is real about what you see with your eyes or on your phone and can you charge your battery from this dandelion ? ?
But you know that question already don’t you .
Topia is derived from the common word “utopia.” “Utopia” literally means “nowhere,” or “no place.” It is derived from the Greek “ou” meaning “not,” and “top(os)” meaning”a place.”
U-topia : lno-where,an imagined place or state of things in which everything is perfect.
E-topia ? another imagined place
AI-topia about to engulf the planet ?
So there it is

All I needed to say is that I would like to live in a Poussin but with my smart phone , and this print is an early sketch of some possible technical details .



TADASHI KAWAMATA

Destruction no. 3 2016
balsa wood and acrylic paint on plywood, 3 parts
210 x 459 x 25 cm

To me Utopia and Dystopia have two different meanings.
Utopia is an imaginary place (the word was coined by Thomas More). This is ok.
I understand it.

But Dystopia comes from Death-topia. Death town, Death city, Death site.
It seems like a Ghost town.
Death and Destruction are also similar.
I imagine a destroyed town to be like a Dystopia.
They are interesting to me.





MIKE NELSON

Cloak of rags (triangulation, the fifth floor stairwell) 2017
concrete, iron, marble, iron, ultramarine blue paint
107.5 x 161.5 x 62 cm

The exchange of goods between humans has been in existence since shortly after the development of toolmaking in the Stone Age and one could feasibly argue that exchange of art objects – beads, wall painting – followed not so long after. The system we have developed within these latter centuries is a convoluted and complex version of this with art still very much within its web. I would like to argue that the art within the last century is critical in this structure because it reveals and aggravates these systems allowing glimpses of something other, a utopia perhaps. Conversely it is when the powers of capital and matter dominate that we create extreme ideology, war, poverty and dystopia.

Perhaps the beginnings of our current economic structure – capitalism – can be traced back to a time when travel across the globe became prevalent in the 15th and 16th centuries, this development was acutely articulated by the value of a certain pigment within the development of art. The word *ultramarine* literally means 'from over the seas' and is derived from lapis lazuli, a semi-precious stone that was mined in what is now Afghanistan. Weight for weight, it was more valuable than gold and it was reserved for use in particular religious painting, for Madonna's cloak for example.

What you see is a cut fragment of a building. The building is relatively tall as it is from the fifth floor stairwell, the section is painted blue, ultramarine blue. The bannister – as we can presume it is – is held upright in its original orientation by miscellaneous rubble also bearing the remnants of blue paint, some masked areas revealing their materiality and sometime function; marble steps, flooring. From this, one can conclude that these remnants are from a building painted blue.

This fragment of a staircase was once part of the UBS building on Avenue de Grande Bretagne in Monaco, it was a building that was sprayed ultramarine blue to create the work *Cloak*, 2016. The experience was of total immersion, as if the interior of the building were a reef in the mediterranean waters that the building looked across and that the Italian merchants would have sailed past to acquire the precious pigment. This was not just a building that housed money, but also greeted those who banked in one of the world's wealthiest municipalities.

The fragment we look at now is of no inherent value, it is condemned to builders' rubble, to its constituent parts: concrete, plaster, steel and marble. A lump hacked out of a building of the highest value real estate in the world, built to hold the riches of those that lived around it. However, exhibited as something other – a sculpture somewhat akin to an oversized flint axe – the object accrues another value, delicately weaving a course through the potentially dystopian with a vision beyond.

This is a work that acknowledges our universal failure and fallibilities, but more specifically and pertinently that of the artist. However, within this failure are glitches between time and matter allowing possible re-calibrations between eye and brain; alchemy is possible and wealth beyond the earthly.

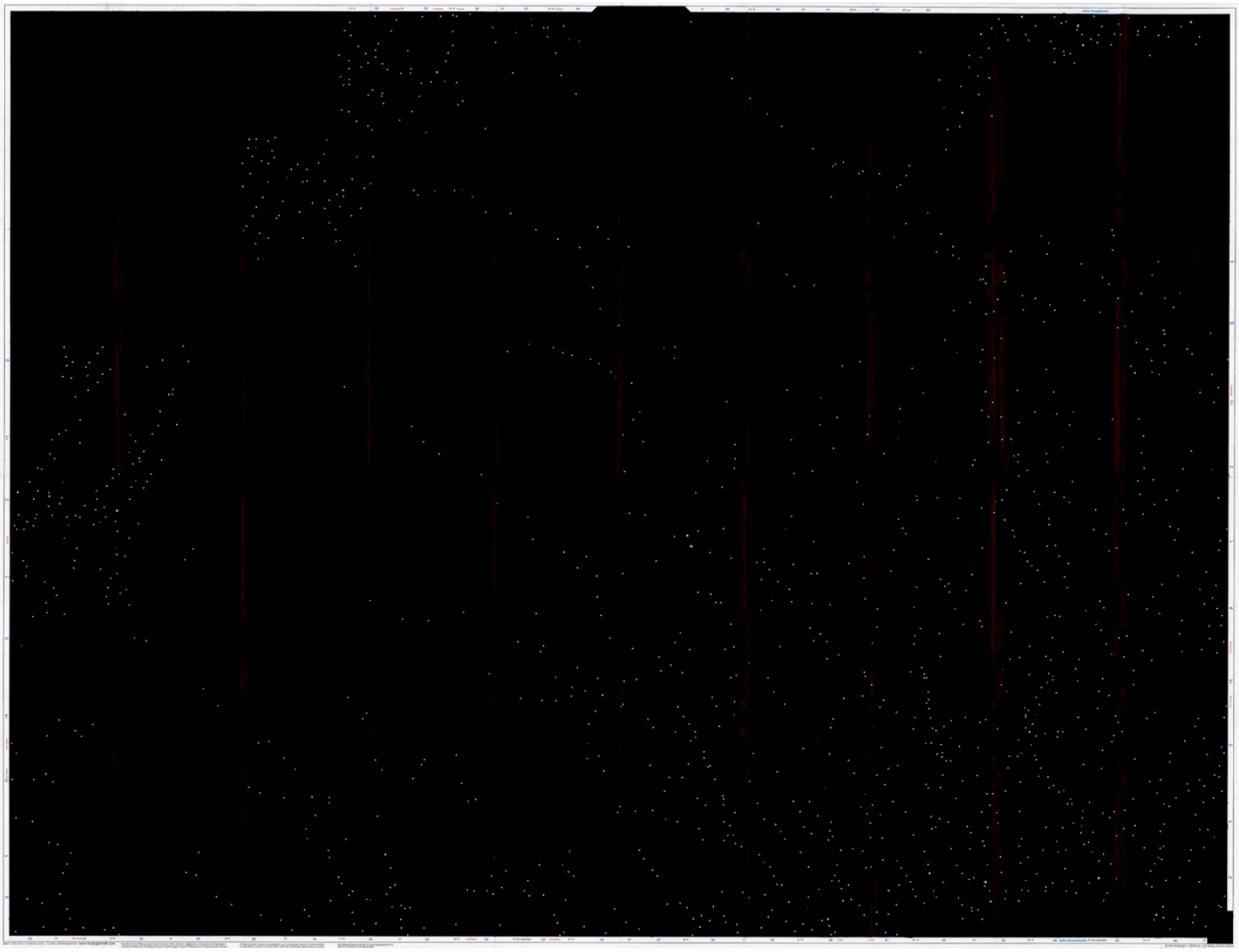


KATHY PRENDERGAST

BLACK MAP SERIES (Lapland, Sweden) 2011
Ink on printed map
95 x 124.5 cm

In the Black Map Series ‘utopia’, meaning *’no place’*, has more relevance than the regular meaning of ‘utopia’ meaning ‘a *good* or *ideal place*’.
Isolating the white location dots on a map by covering all other information with layers of black ink, the places we live in; the villages, towns and cities are dislocated from their surroundings and are suspended in ‘no place’ to form their own constellations. They create a silent dislocation, between place and space, between actuality and mentality.

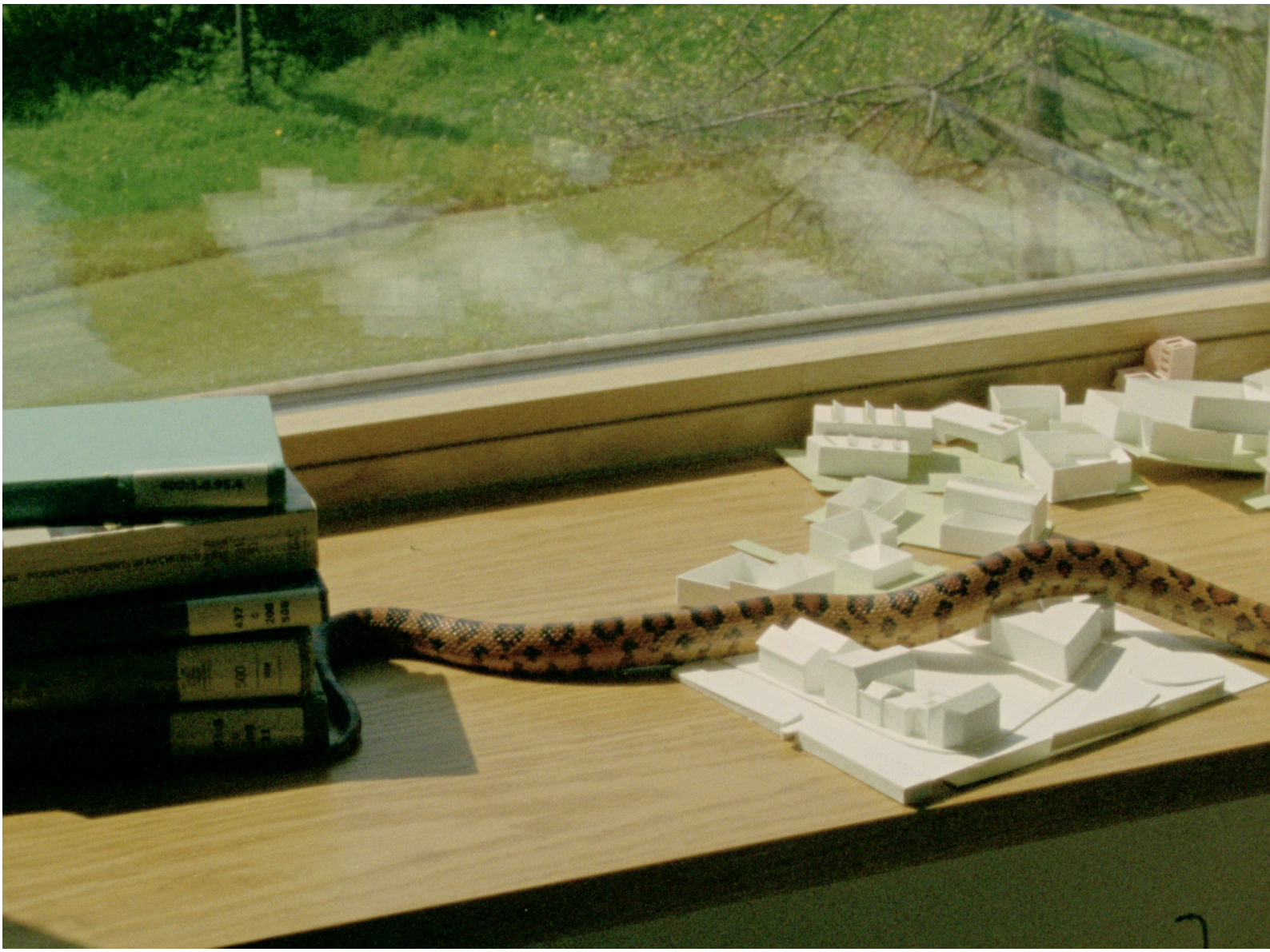
Like beads on a necklace strung together in a line or a smattering of individual dots strewn across space, the patterns made by the white dots convey our tracks across space. They describe our relationship to each other without the interruption of physical and political borders. They create a conversation of how we live together, our connections to each other and how we have used the land to migrate and settle across space and time. Perhaps this is utopia.



BEN RIVERS

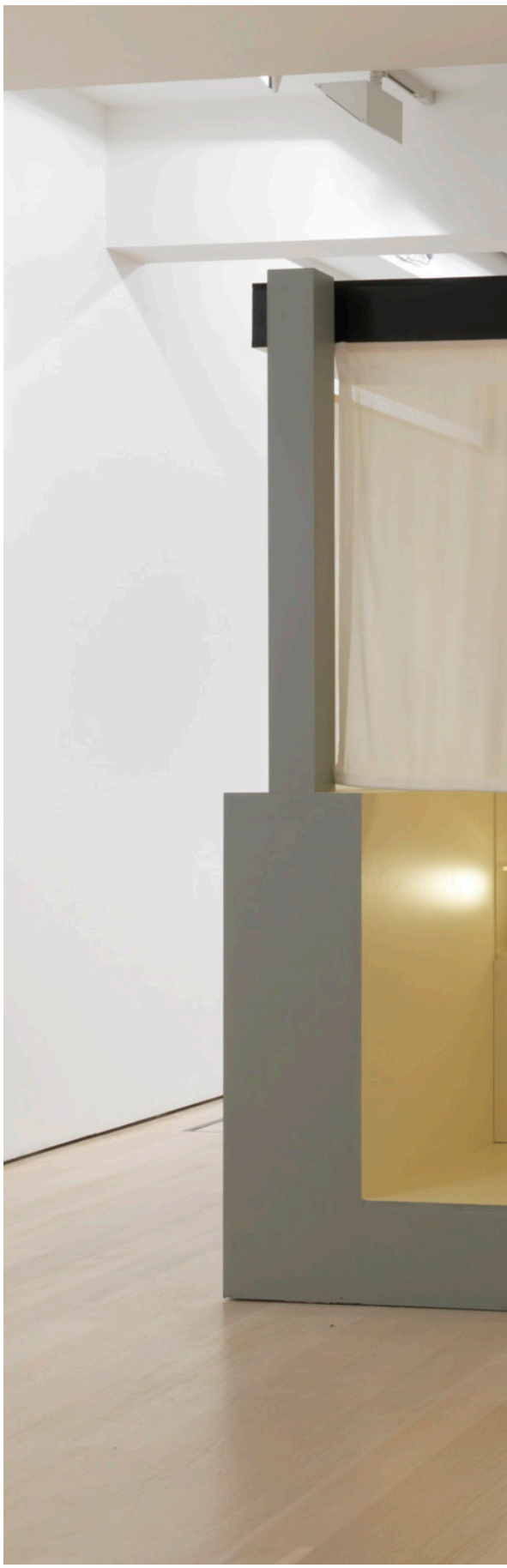
Trees Down Here, 2018
16 mm film, colour, sound
13 minutes

I live on a rock floating in space. On the rock there are giant domes and huge structures housing people who have plenty of space each and no fixed gender. Sexual pleasure is enjoyed in public gardens as well as in private bedrooms. The rock floats around a planet that looks beautiful from a distance, but if you actually went there you'd be dead in minutes from the toxic air. In the domes there are forests, and in the forests there are friendly creatures who we, the humans, can communicate with telepathically, as we do to each other, though we haven't lost the power of vocal speech and can inhibit our minds from being read. We frequently take space walks, because it's the most beautiful experience you never really tire of. Our rock in space is run by a gentle dictator, who has been in power for well over 300 years. At first things took time to settle down, but now everyone has a role, a home, and good health. When our bodies begin to get old we go to the hospital and thousands of nanobots are sent into our bodies to fix any issues. People like to keep some wrinkles because it's considered a sign of wisdom, but apart from that our bodies stay in good shape. There's no war or famine, these are old terms we learn about from the past, when we lived on the beautiful toxic planet. Each living space looks out onto a central courtyard where there is a garden and a tree from some part of the planet before it was killed. Most living things have been built from seeds and code brought from the planet long ago. People can decide when they have lived long enough, and can choose their way of death, many choosing to float into space, while a gas is slowly released into your suit so you fall into a deep slumber and then die. When your vital signs are gone the suit explodes, sending your elementary particles to join the cosmos. When someone leaves this world, room for a child opens up, the parents being chosen by lottery. All minor jobs are done by robots. Working hours are kept to no more than four hours a day, four days a week. Leisure is essential and can take many forms, including sitting around talking, reading, walking in the forests and talking with animals, mycology (there has been a long running programme attempting communication with fungi, but their language is complex and hard to grasp), sex, and sports in large anti-gravity chambers, which is the only form of violence and pain. There are plenty of other rocks floating around the old beautiful planet. Supposedly there was a moon, which was blown up and this became multiple homebases. There used to be communication between the different rocks, but after sometime it was decided that it's best we leave each other alone. We all have very different ways of doing things and it just causes arguments.



YUKO SHIRAISHI

Intermission - One Person House 2019
painted wood, cloth and electric light
211 x 295 x 148 cm
(based on Georges Vantongerloo's
'Desk Lamp', 1926, 20 x 28 x 15 cm)





ALISON TURNBULL

Einstein's Tower 2013
oil and graphite on canvas
180 x 150 cm

Cosmic Citizenship

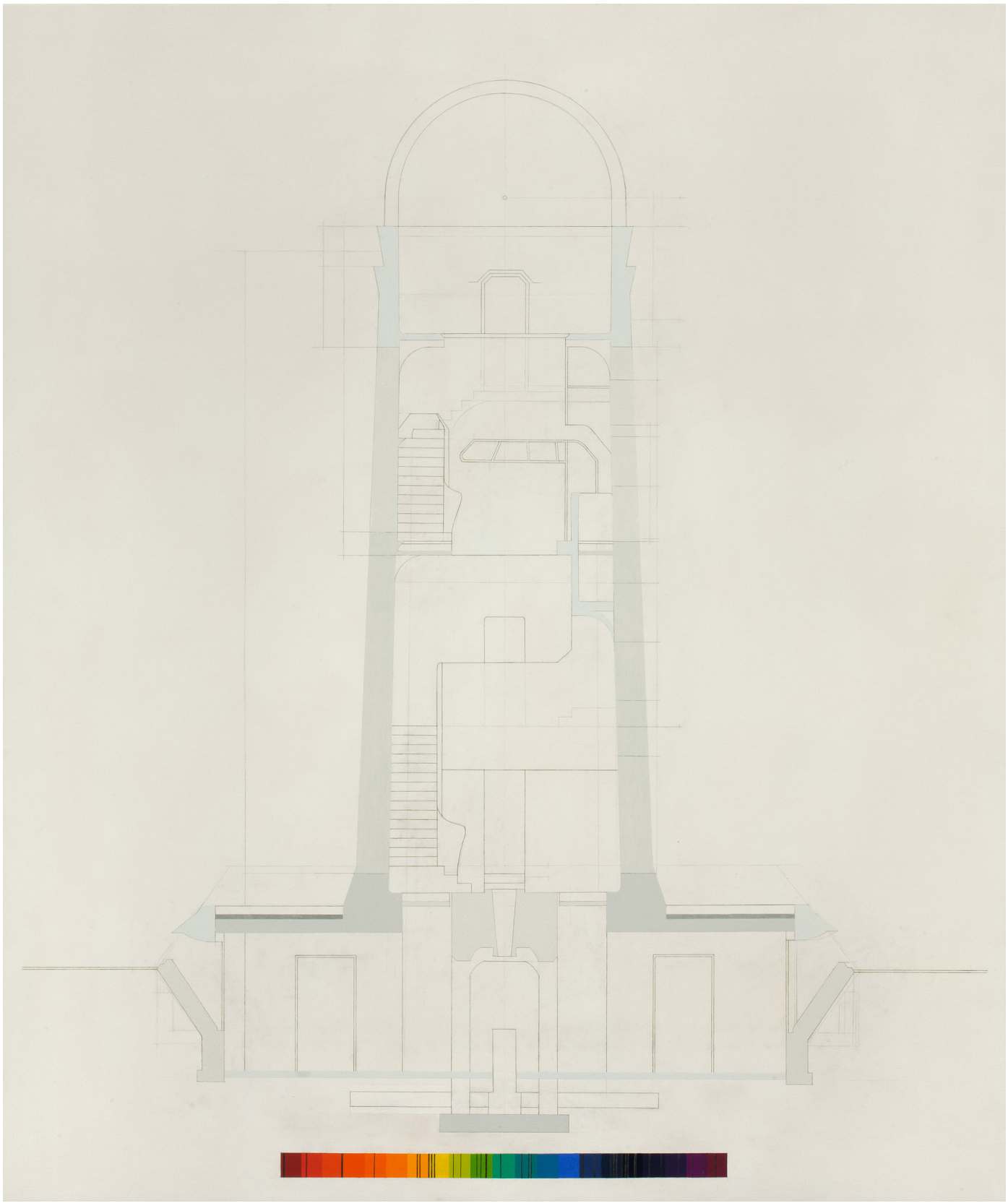
The idea of revisiting notions of Utopia and Dystopia seems timely in the uncertain and darkening days we are now living through.

The Einstein Tower in Potsdam, the brainchild of visionary astronomer Erwin Finlay Freundlich, was designed by architect Erich Mendelsohn in 1920. Conceived in a utopian spirit of cultural optimism and scientific collaboration, this experimental research station was created to verify the theories of Albert Einstein. A path of light from the telescope in the solar observatory was directed into the basement laboratories so that astrophysicists could study the phenomenon known as the red shift.

The dynamic originality of the building was immediately recognized. Einstein himself, however, on his only recorded visit to the tower, said nothing about its design, until, as he was leaving, he whispered a single word to Mendelsohn: 'Organic!'

In 1933, after the National Socialists came to power in Germany, the tower was renamed and stripped of any association to Einstein and his work; although some scientific research continued there, it was largely to military ends. "The Hitler Salute Also Applies at the Einstein Tower" announced Freundlich when he was summarily dismissed as its director.

Freundlich, Einstein and Mendelsohn were all forced into exile. Freundlich settled in Britain and in 1946 wrote to Mendelsohn, "Everyone wishes me to become a British citizen but I feel quite happy being a Czech, longing for cosmic citizenship to be created."



RICHARD WILSON

Start - Stop Building 2019
plywood, glass, paint, inkjet prints, edition of 3
56.6 x 68.8 x 51.8 cm

I purchased a paper model kit of the Old Nuerburgring Start-Finish building. From the kit I isolated a one quarter section of the building's components and then had them scaled up and cut in plywood as x8 kits, x4 as normal and x4 flipped horizontally. By assembling all x8 sections together produced a sort of flipped mirroring that appears to have no start or finish to its appearance or sense of gravity. The x8 linked sections created a unique symmetrical other whole.

The building's elements follow an 'order', and each order is meant to mimic a modulor system which in turn create a sense of harmonious and beautiful proportion and balance. There is the capacity to see the whole in the part and the part in the whole. This architectural symmetry and play on proportions likens the model to a temple.

In such a process the function of the building becomes almost irrelevant and it is only the signage that hints back to its former purpose. However, having the signage also flipped helped enhance the modules and overall appearance of the model. The marriage between typography and architecture made the model eye-catching. However all the signs have completely different fonts and sizes which would normally be a jarring experience. We know that if something seems jarring, then it can be disturbing. But in this work we remain liberated by the building's lack of gravity and the closer one comes to floating the closer one comes to perfection.

Ultimately this model is about the ordering of thought


AUTOMOBILCLUB von DEU
Terrasse
SHELL X-100 MOTOR OEL
GOODYEAR
UNIROYAL
ADAC
ARAL
motorenöl
lönnatom

GARY WOODLEY

bench for viewing film 2019
bamboo, edition of 10
42 x 120 x 42 cm

cube-stool-sidetable-storage 2019
bamboo, edition of 10
42 x 42 x 42 cm

In his book ‘Between Dystopia and Utopia’ from 1966 the urban planner Constantinos Doxiadis seeks to make a connection ‘…..reality and dreams move on different planes and at different scales and speeds. What we need is a place where the dream can meet with reality, the place which can satisfy the dreamer, be accepted by the scientist, and someday be built by the builder, the city which will be in-place – the *entopia*.

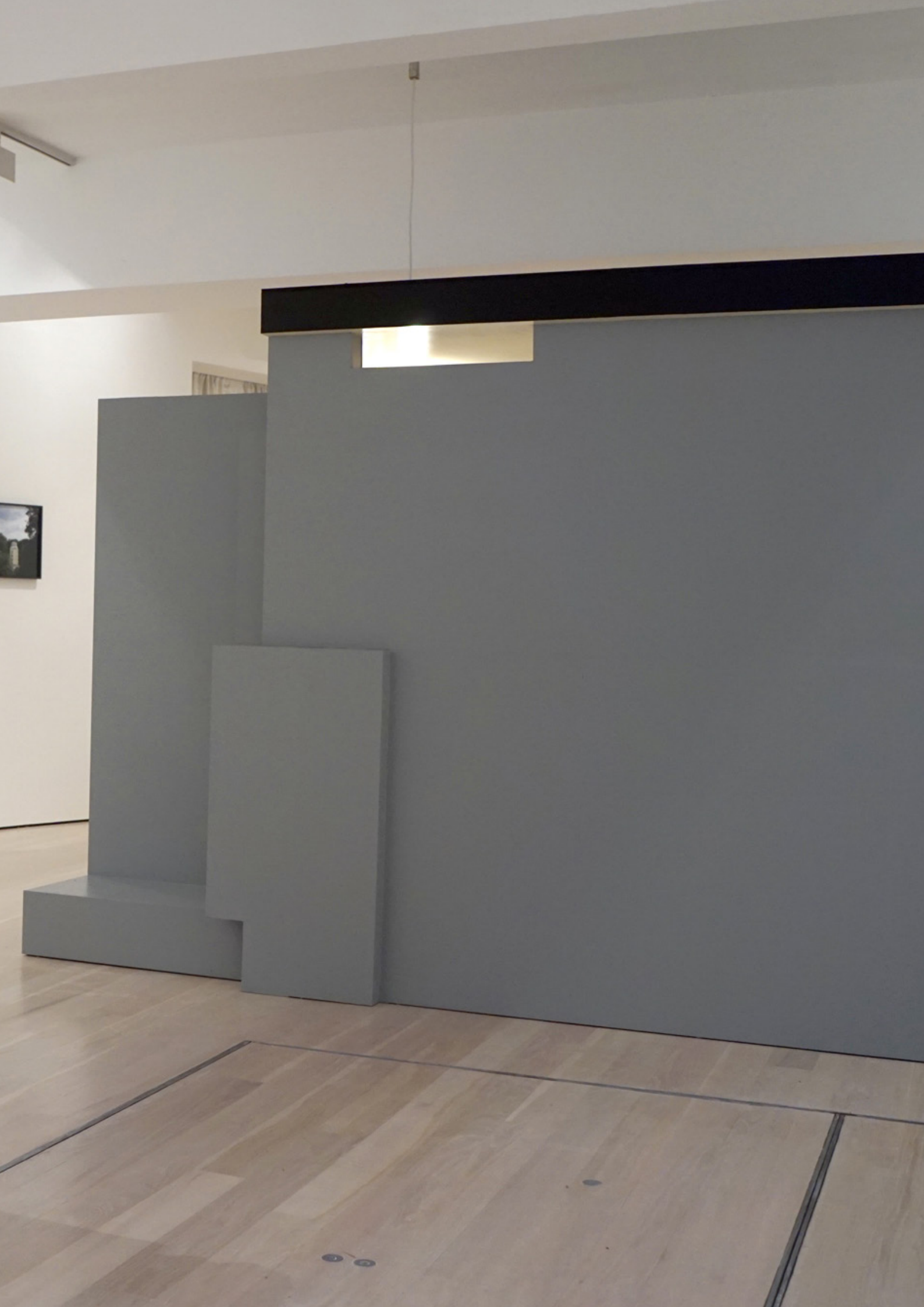
The designer Enzo Mari sought to stimulate ‘the possibility of freeing oneself from the existing social conditioning that exists in our relationship with the environment’ through his ‘Proposta per un autoprogettazione’ of 1974 at Galleria Milano. This was a set of designs for basic furniture elements using simple lengths of a standard wood put together just with nails, and offered as a set of instructions free to anyone who was interested. Reviewed by G.C. Argan for ‘L’Espresso’, 5th May 1974 ‘….like Robinson on his island. He had to start making the tools that he would then use to create a place that he could live in if he wanted to survive. Mari is right, everyone should do design: after all, it is the best way to prevent yourself from being designed.’

Friedrich Kiesler became pre-occupied with an ideallised simple one family house form complete with painting and sculpture. ‘The Endless House functions as a seminal cell containing new possibilities for life, as it guarantees the coordination of the constraints and the – physical, mental, social, mystical and magical – energies of man within a spatial and spiritual continuum’ as identified by Dieter Bogner in ‘Inside the Endless House’ (Böhlau Wein 1997). ‘The *Endless House* is called “Endless” because all ends meet and meet continuously’ (Friedrich Kiesler’ Inside the Endless House’, New York 1964).

There seems to be a continual need for a first place, a test place, a place for the prototype, a *prototopia*.








ADAC
UNIROYAL
BOSCH
SHELL
ARAL

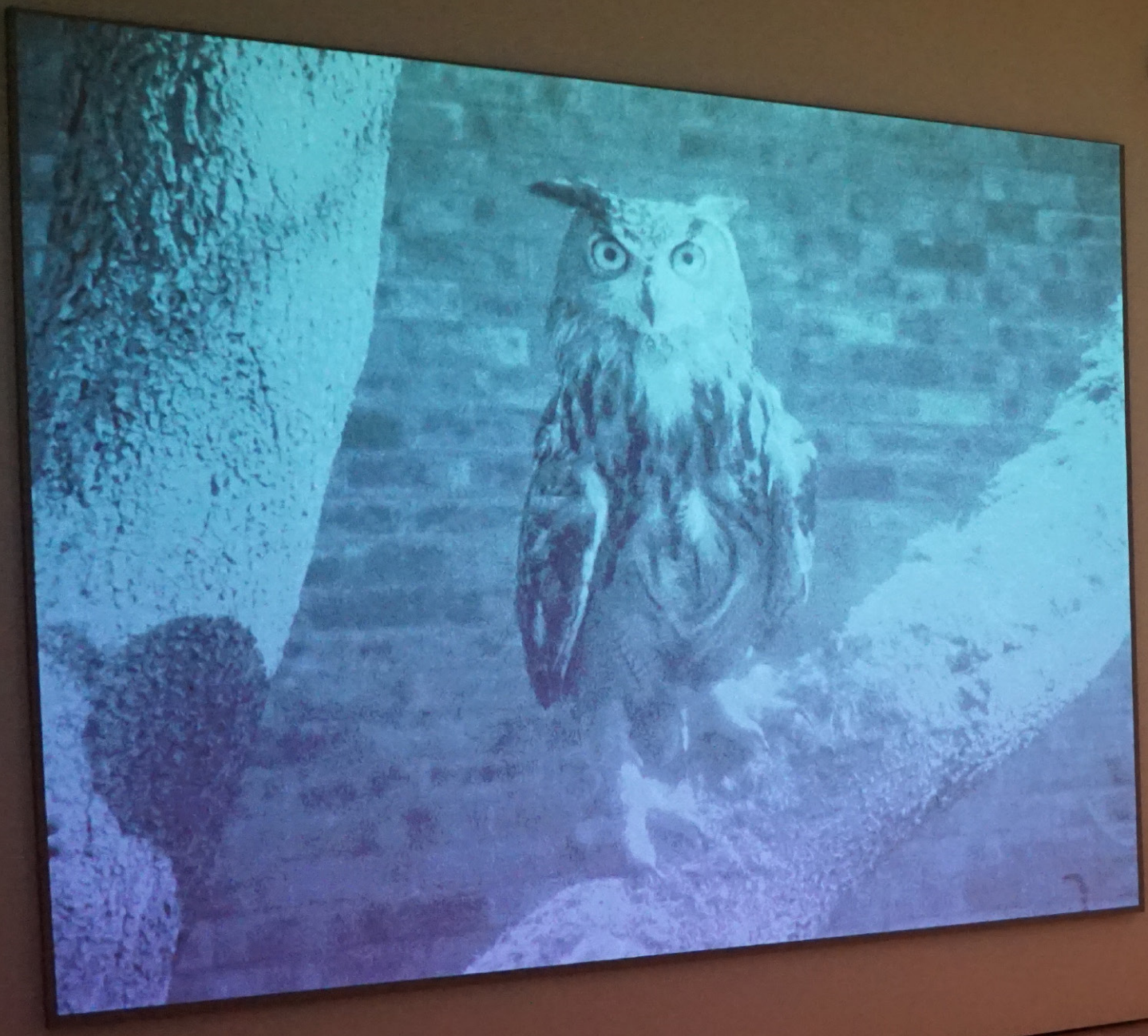








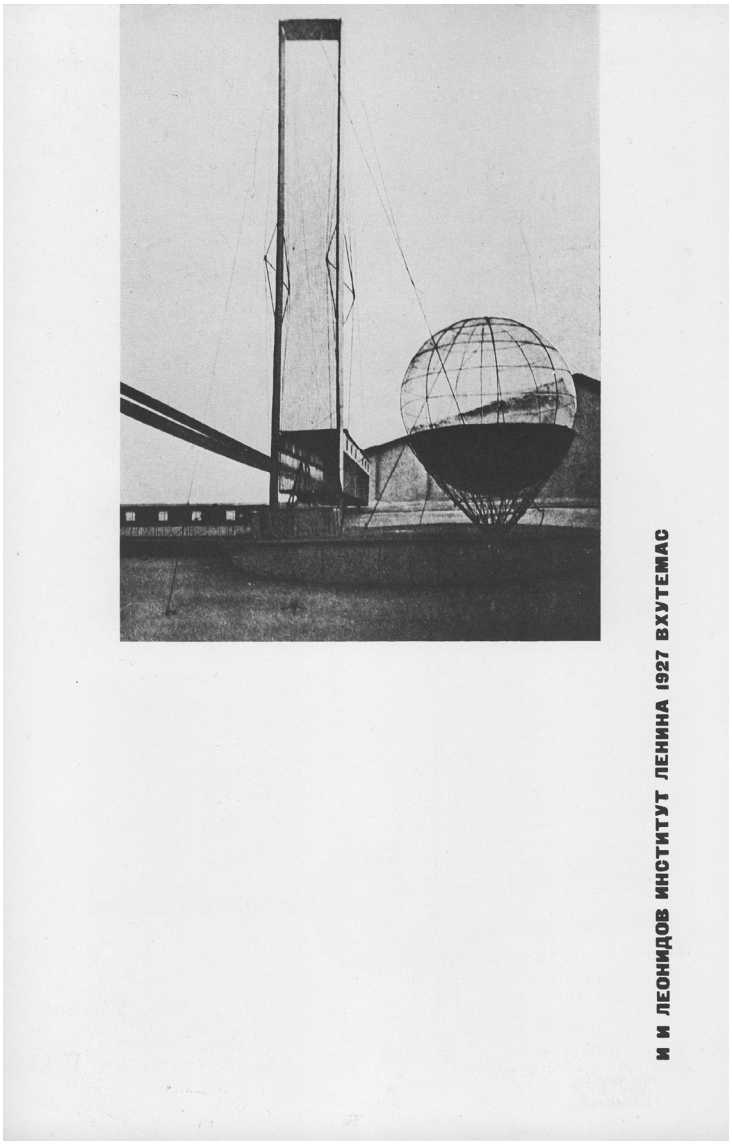






UTOPIA AND INVENTION: THE IMAGINARY OF THE ARCHITECT IVAN LEONIDOV

by Dr Andrei Nakov



Ivan Leonidov
The Lenin Institute of Librarianship

In the vast panorama of the architectural invention of the 20th century, Ivan Leonidov's creative brilliance (1902-1959) occupies a key position, a remarquable one.

If the anti-modernist constraints of the "Soviet" society did not allow him the possibility of bequeathing to posterity significant constructions, his projects on paper, of a dazzling invention and exceptionally graphic refinement, were well known at the time and were widely disseminated several decades after his death, making him a quasi-mythical figure of modern architecture.

Throughout the 20th century, the poetic intensity of his projects fascinated Russian interpreters of modern architecture and even more so Western architects (see Le Corbusier)[1] as much as the constructivist principles, and particularly the genetic sources of his architectural poetry remained somewhat in the shadows.

A magnificent flagship of "architectural constructivism", Leonidov's work was illustrated during the years 1926-1932 by grandiose visions. His Muscovite building of the newspaper *Izvestia* (1926), a competition project for the *Monument to Christopher Columbus* (1928-1929) in the Dominican Republic and, above all, the library of the Lenin Institute (1927), were a real fire-work display of the constructivist poetry presented in the final-year project work defended by the young architect at the Vkhoutemas school, in Moscow.

After that, he engaged in ambitious projects such as the Magnitogorsk industrial complex. Considered fascinating for its spatial audacity and its pure graphic refinement, the Lenin Institute was honoured with a special issue of the Russian magazine CA (*Contemporary Architecture* No. 4-5 of 1927). This one-time issue of equally exceptional size was dedicated to the tenth anniversary of the "October Revolution", an event raised at the time to the dimension of the founding myths of the "new society".

Born in a small village in the Tver region, Ivan Léonidov was born out of a native peasant family and benefited from the strength of the "spirit of the people" which his father generously passed on to him. Arriving in Moscow in 1921, the young Léonidov had access to the new architectural education that began to be taught by the Vkhoutemas, a school of the art structured according to the principles of the new abstract art that quickly flourished in Russia during the years 1916-1919.
This revolution of the "constructivist" imagery, due to the logic of the non-objective art, had replaced the old vision of static buildings overnight. It was going to flourish in a new revolutionary vision, which was the exact opposite of the old "academic" tradition, a system of values which was dismissed by the explosion of non-objective art.

The year 1921 was a pivotal year of the modernist escalation in Moscow. It was marked in the annals of modern art by exhibitions as radical as that of the young group "Obmokhou" (Young Painters' Association), displaying the abstract "linear" sculptures of Rodchenko, Yoganson, Medounetzki as well as those of the brothers Gueorgui and Vladimir Stenberg.

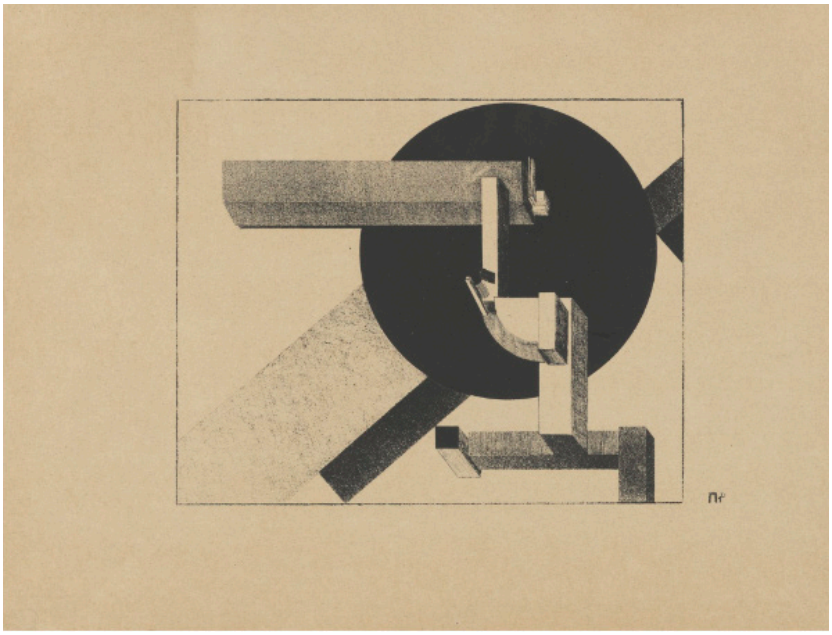
In September 1921 the exhibition *"5x5=25"* was the ultimate confirmation and the no less radical overcoming of the constructivist painting of Alexandra Exter, that of Rodchenko or that of Popova and Vesnin. In the pictorial practice of these artists, painting became a very bold manipulation of linear patterns, with the dynamic tension of matter replacing the old "descriptive" logic of planes.

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1 Cf. Andrei Gozac et Andrei Léonidov, *Ivan Léonidov*, ed. par Catherine Cooke, Londres, Academy Editions, 1988.



Vladimir Tatlin
Model for the Monument to the Third Internationl, 1920



Lazar El Lissitzky
Proun 1 D from Proun, 1920

The traditional material was then replaced by the dynamics of the lines, carrying the energy of the shapes and construction, the latter having been erected with the purpose of the "constructivist" practice. Alexander Vesnin was one of the first teachers in the Vkhoutemas' department of architecture where Ivan Leonidov entered in 1921.

The second half of 1921 was also marked by the Muscovite presentation of Lissitzky's "Proun" utopian projects. His collection of *Proun* lithographs was printed at the time, as the artist explained the logic of this suprematist "architecture of the future" at public conferences at the Moscow Institute of Artistic Culture (InkhouK), a newly created research and discussion forum.
The architectural invention of the Malewiczean suprematism reached thus in full force Moscow, where new forces joined this current (Klucis, Senkin, Kudriashov). It is important to remember that the summer of 1921 was marked in Moscow primarily by the now-famous "Tower" (Monument to the Third International) of Tatlin. The same project which, at the end of June, was featured in a presentation made on the margins of the Komintern's Congress (The Communist International).
A grandiose and audaciously utopian project of an unprecedented scale at the time, from one day to the next this work would mark, more than any other, the architectural poetry of the 20th century. As an event that was meant to be global in scope, this Congress would generously open the doors of world fame to Tatlin's "Tower". These were the poetic ingredients that served as vectors to the young Vkhoutemas student's vast architectural horizons.

Contact with Aleksandr Vesnin was to be all the more stimulating. Vesnin, a long-time friend and comrade of Tatlin's cubist experiences, had been intimately present in 1915 when Tatlin's first reliefs were created, those artworks whose importance for the birth of abstract sculpture, and that of constructivist in particular, can never be underestimated.

Besides Vesnin, among the initiators of the new architectural thinking, Nikolaï Ladovski (1881-1941) and Vladimir Krinski (1890-1971), another companion of Vesnin and Tatlin and a great theorist of modern architecture, were also present in Moscow's art scene.

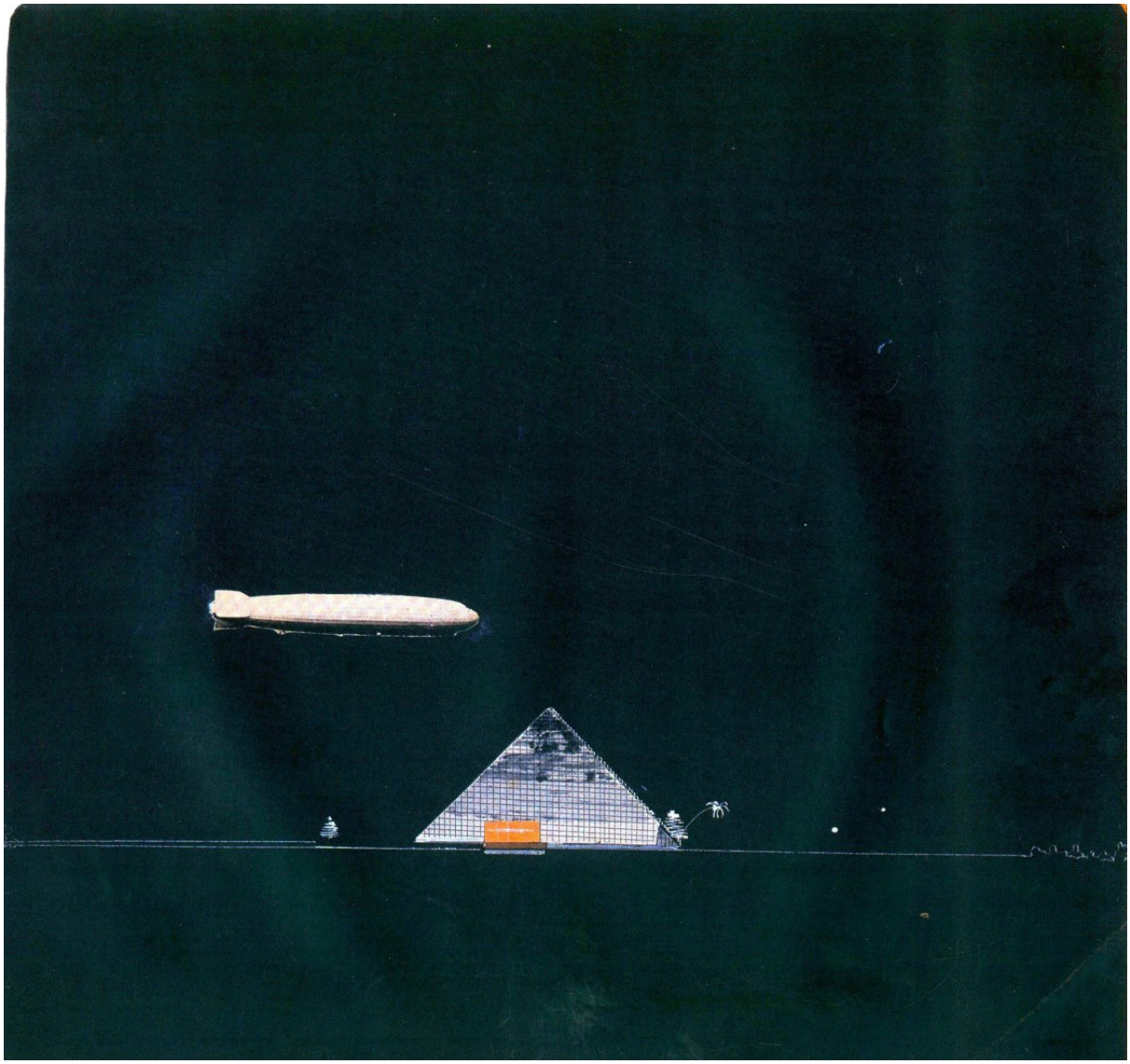
From the winter of 1915-1916, he was one of the first to appreciate in perspective the originality of Tatlin's reliefs, the most revolutionary works ever seen. In 1919, Ladovski was to provide one of the first and most remarkable definitions of the - future - "constructivist" architecture: "Space, not stone, is the material of architecture," he stated. Unlike the inertia and the immovable gravity of the stone, space, conceived as a dynamic medium, thus animated by new energetic forces, became at that time the new *material* of non-objective sculpture (see Tatlin's reliefs).
During the 1920s, this type of material - a space animated by energetic tensions - became the primary material of the *constructive* dynamics of Leonidov's architecture. Still in the twenties, Katarzyna Kobro, a sculptor working in Poland but influenced in 1920-1921 by the same Muscovite constructivist spirit, marked by the example of Tatlin as well as of Malevich, who she met in Smolensk, thus defined the spatial logic of her abstract sculpture (1929), a visionary creation among the most original of her time:

1. The Sculpture is part of the space, the condition of its organic quality and its link to space.

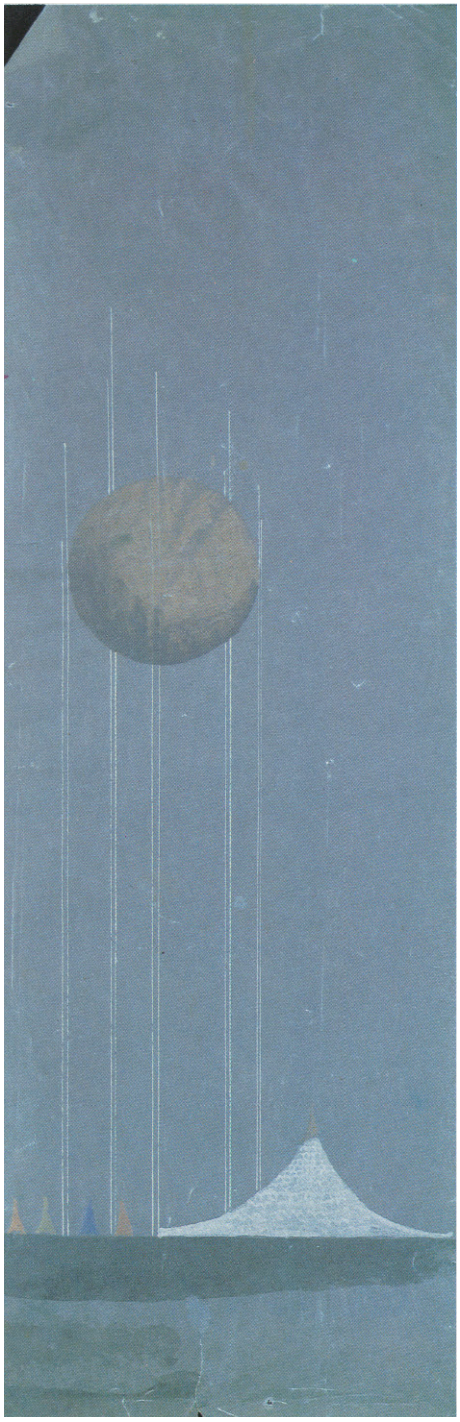
2. The Sculpture is not a composition of the shape for itself, but the composition of space.

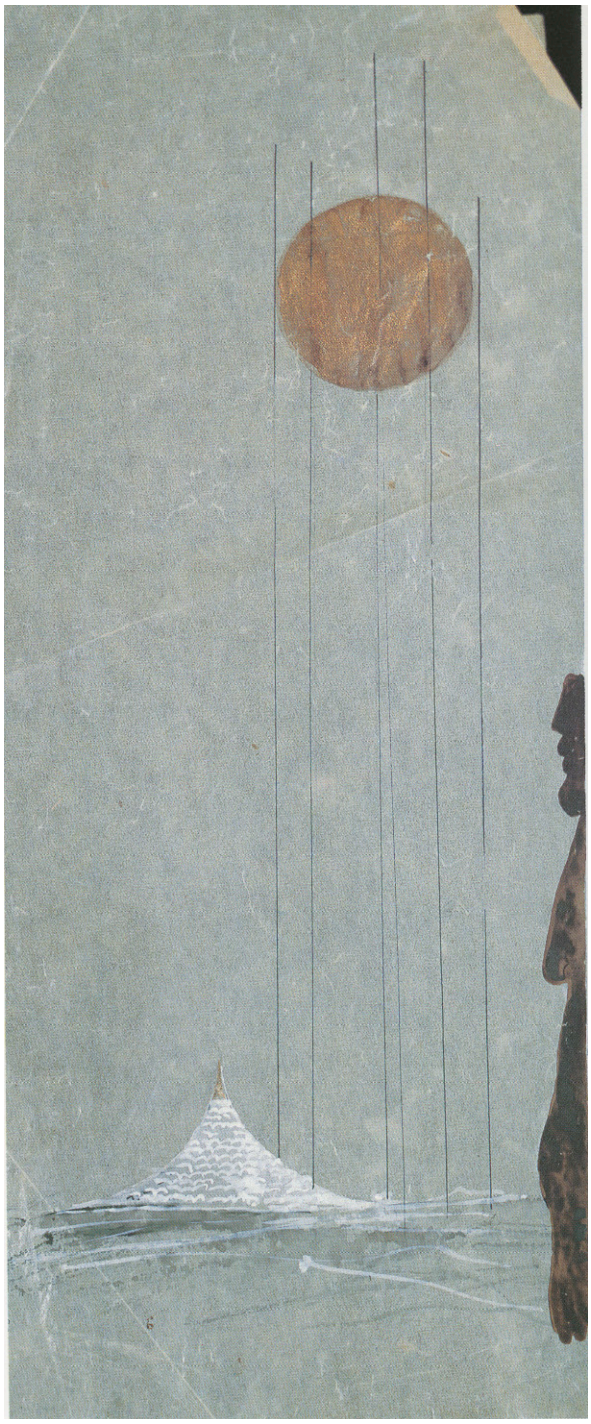
3. The energy of successive forms in space creates a space-time rhythm.

In developing this type of spatial thinking, one could approach in a "sensible" way the latest creation of Leonidov, a creation in which the manipulation of space energies, the Alpha and

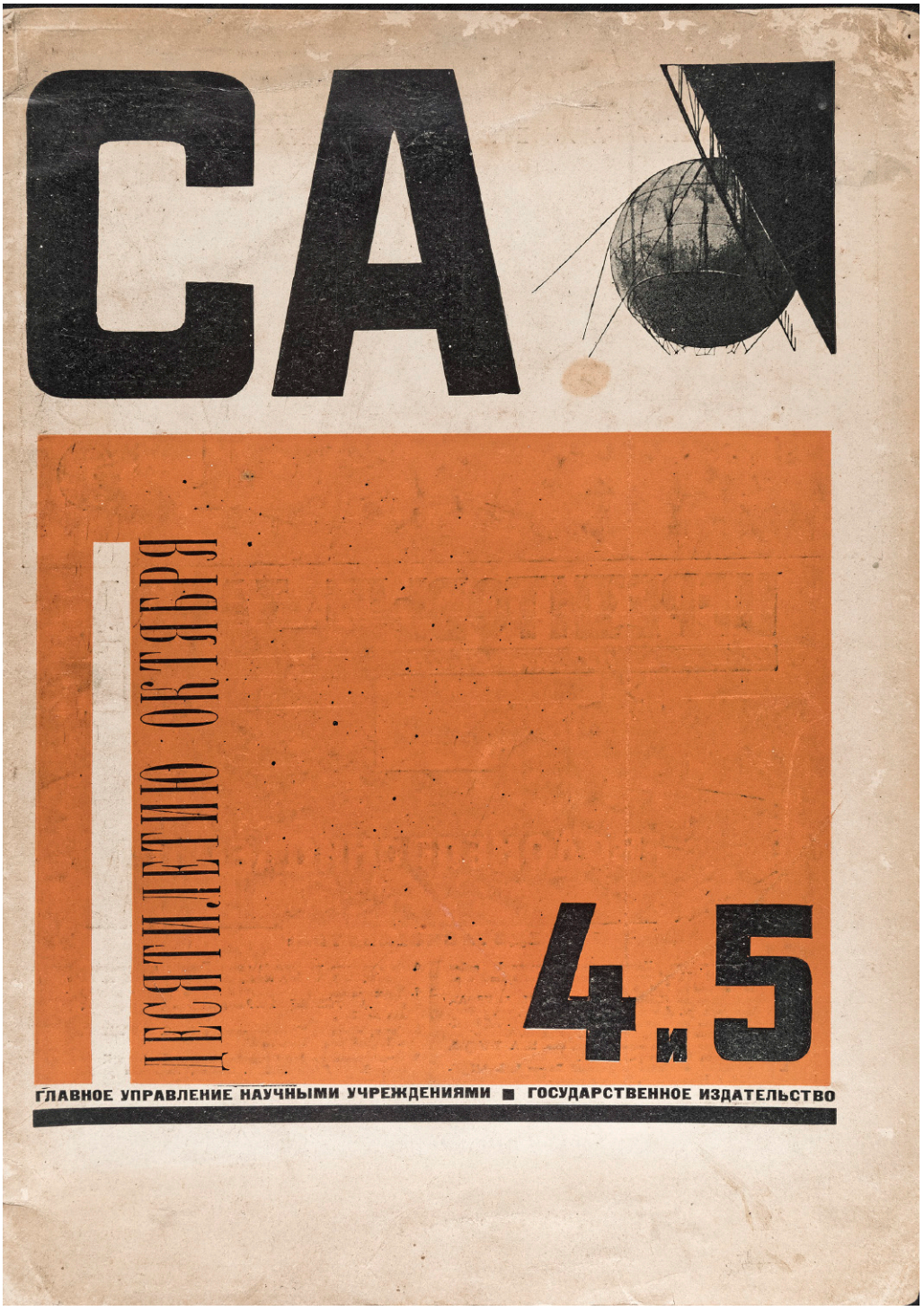


Ivan Leonidov
Palace of Culture on the site of the Simonov Monastery, Moscow, 1930

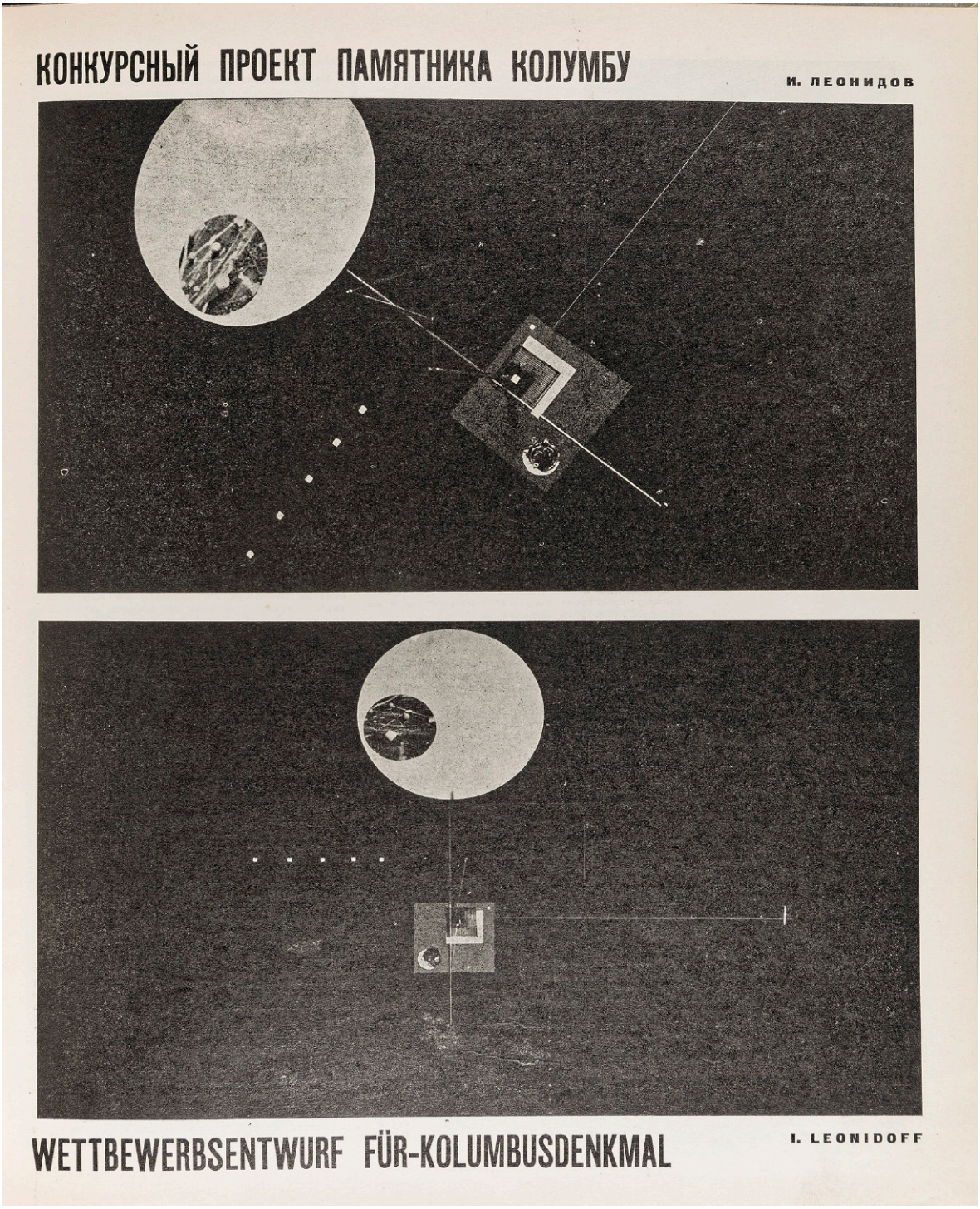




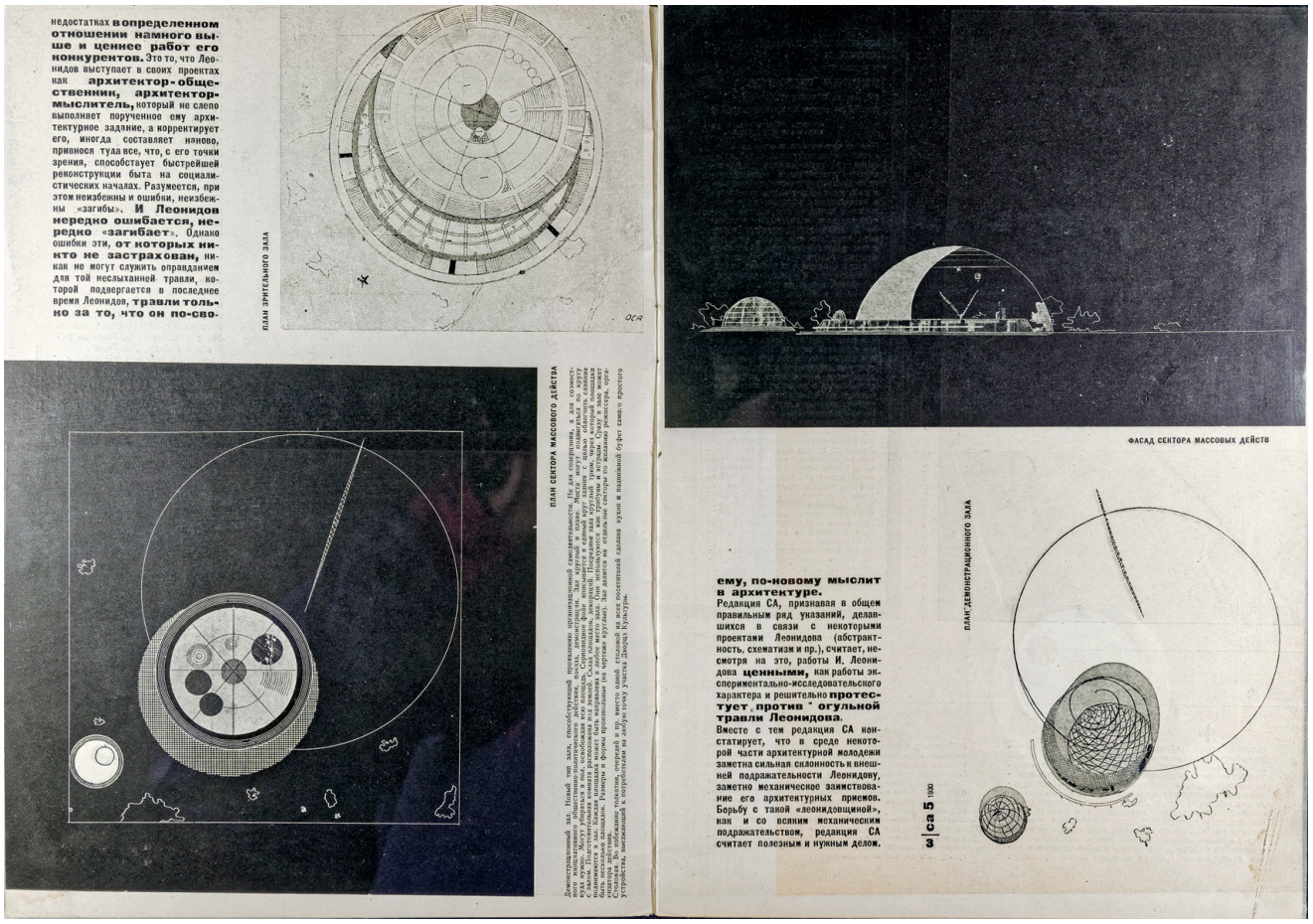
Ivan Leonidov
The City of the Sun, 1943-1959



CA Magazine (Contemporary Architecture) 4.5, 1927



Ivan Leonidov, competition for the *Monument to Christopher Columbus* (1928-29), taken from CA 4, 1929



недостатках **в определенном отношении намного выше и ценнее работ его конкурентов.** Это то, что Леонидов выступает в своих проектах как **архитектор-общественник, архитектор-мыслитель,** который не слепо выполняет порученное ему архитектурное задание, а корректирует его, иногда составляет наново, принося туда все, что, с его точки зрения, способствует быстрейшей реконструкции быта на социалистических началах. Разумеется, при этом неизбежны и ошибки, неизбежны «загибы». **И Леонидов нередко ошибается, нередко «загибает».** Однако ошибки эти, **от которых никто не застрахован,** никак не могут служить оправданием для той неслыханной травли, которой подвергается в последнее время Леонидов, **травли только за то, что он по-своему, по-новому мыслит в архитектуре.**

Редакция СА, признавая в общем правильным ряд указаний, делавшихся в связи с некоторыми проектами Леонидова (абстрактность, схематизм и пр.), считает, несмотря на это, работы И. Леонидова **ценными,** как работы экспериментально-исследовательского характера и решительно **протестует против "огульной травли Леонидова.**

Вместе с тем редакция СА констатирует, что в среде некоторой части архитектурной молодежи заметна сильная склонность к внешней подражательности Леонидову, заметно механическое заимствование его архитектурных приемов. Борьбу с такой «леонидовщиной», как и со всяким механическим подражательством, редакция СА считает полезным и нужным делом.

ПЛАН ЗРИТЕЛЬНОГО ЗАЛА

ПЛАН СЕКТОРА МАССОВОГО ДЕЙСТВА

ФАСАД СЕКТОРА МАССОВЫХ ДЕЙСТ

ПЛАН ДЕМОНСТРАЦИОННОГО ЗАЛА

Ivan Leonidov, Competition for Palace of Culture for the Proletarskii district of Moscow, 1930, taken from CA 5, 1930

Omega of constructivist logic, constitutes the basic definition and forms the entire dynamics of “construction”, a concept which according to Mies van der Rohe (1922) replaced “architecture”.
As for Leonidov, he quickly arrived at visions where transparency and guide-lines define constructions, launched like cosmic vessels in a new space. His tension structures were daring and surprising to his contemporaries in both East and West. They still appeal to us today. This was the end of the world of static matter, of immobile relations, of “proportions”. The reign of the Egyptian pyramid (neo-classicism) was over.

Similar to the revolutionary system of Kobro, which was also that of Moholy-Nagy or Theo van Doesburg (and later), this dynamic approach was far from the decorative games of Yakov Chernikhov, a lyrical designer lost in the late 1920s in an almost abstract architectural futurism but of a trivially decorative kind. Just like what happened to the painting from the “second” Kandinsky, an artist and teacher at the Bauhaus who, from 1923, also lost himself in an abstract-geometric painting, strained by sterile academic formalism.
On the contrary, Leonidov’s architectural ensembles flourished in the vastness of extraordinary spatial visions, all imagined from aerial perspectives in which the existence of volumes is only justified by the dynamics of “freestanding” shapes.
One can find, in his case, the principles of non-objective art as proclaimed by Malevich in the aesthetics of which the *existential* autonomy of the shapes, these suprematist “*beings*”, defined their very existence.

That leads to the question of fantasy and utopia. Since their appearance at the end of the 18th century, the “aerial” visions found in Leonidov were considered “fanciful”, if not “utopian”. From the mid-19th century onwards, they became famous, mainly thanks to the balloon voyages of the French photographer Nadar, who was a grand adventurer of balloon travelling as well as of photography.

A half-century later, and especially from the appearance of the first flights of aeroplanes, from the 1900s onwards, what was once a fantasy became a banality of everyday life.

Is that not the case with every imaginative gem? Jules Verne’s idea of a voyage *From the earth to the moon* (1865), a “utopian” fantasy at his time, was taken up in the cinema thirty years later by Georges Méliès, whose 1902 film *A trip to the moon* was one of the first filmed productions of “science fiction”.

Sixty years later, it would also become a reality.

Thus, Leonidov’s projects, showpieces of artistic ingenuity and space finesse, were a century ahead of their time in architectural construction.

As utopia became a possible construction, ceasing to be a *u-topia*, it became *an art*. The strength of innovation in his case was measured by the negative response that it certainly provoked: as Malevich’s suprematism was fought in the artist’s lifetime, so was the audacity of Leonidov’s projects.

His constructivist poetry was so despised by the critics of innovative architecture that from 1930 they launched the reactionary insult of “leonidification” of architecture, in favour of a sinister de-escalation which they called “recognition of the achievements of the past”.

In this way were repudiated, for more than half a century, the brilliant inventions of one of the greatest poets of modern architecture.

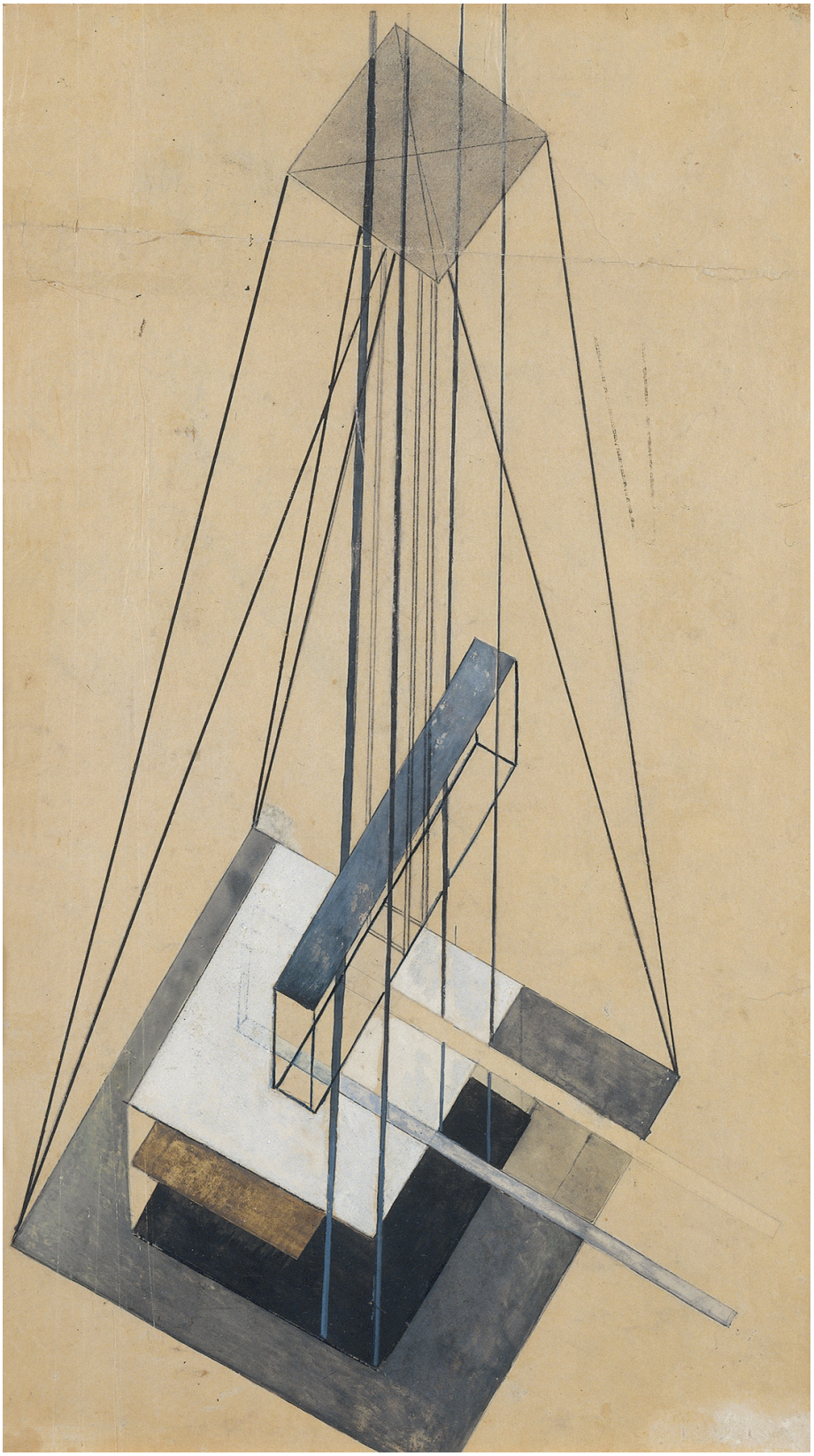
FREDERICK KIESLER

Endless House 1959
concrete and wire mesh, aluminium coating
38.1 x 66 x 25.4 cm



GUSTAV KLUCIS

Architectural Study 1921-22
gouache, ink and pencil on paper laid on card
39.5 x 24.8 cm



EL LISSITZKY

Wendingen 1921
book
33 x 33 cm


WENDINGEN

KASIMIR MALEVICH

Steps - Project for suprematist decor for the Red Theatre Leningrad 1931
watercolour and pencil on paper
21.4 x 15 cm

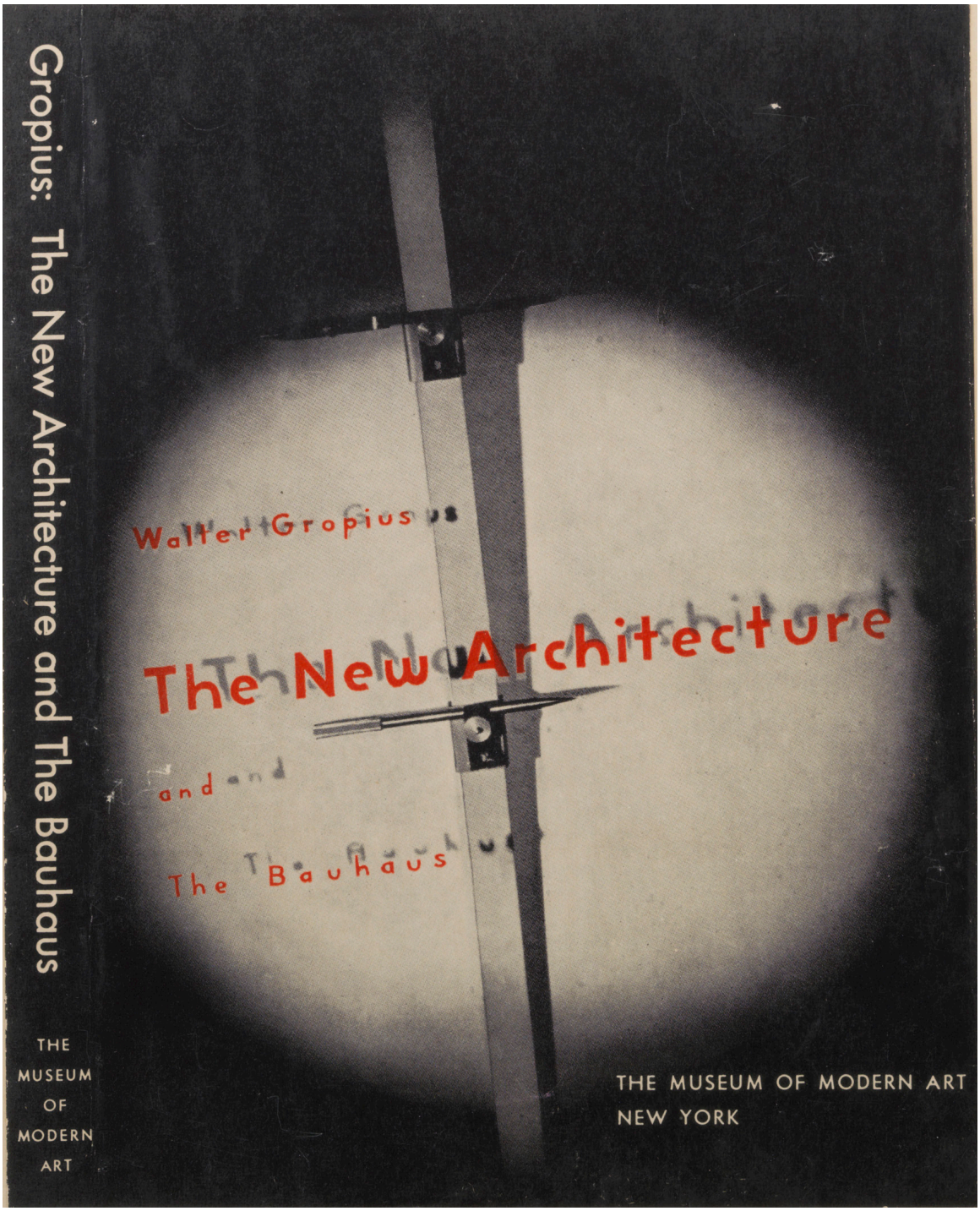


LASZLO MOHOLY-NAGY

original cover for “The New Architecture and the Bauhaus” by Walter Gropius 1936
book cover mounted on paper
image: 20 x 16 cm, paper: 50 x 40 cm

Gropius: The New Architecture and The Bauhaus

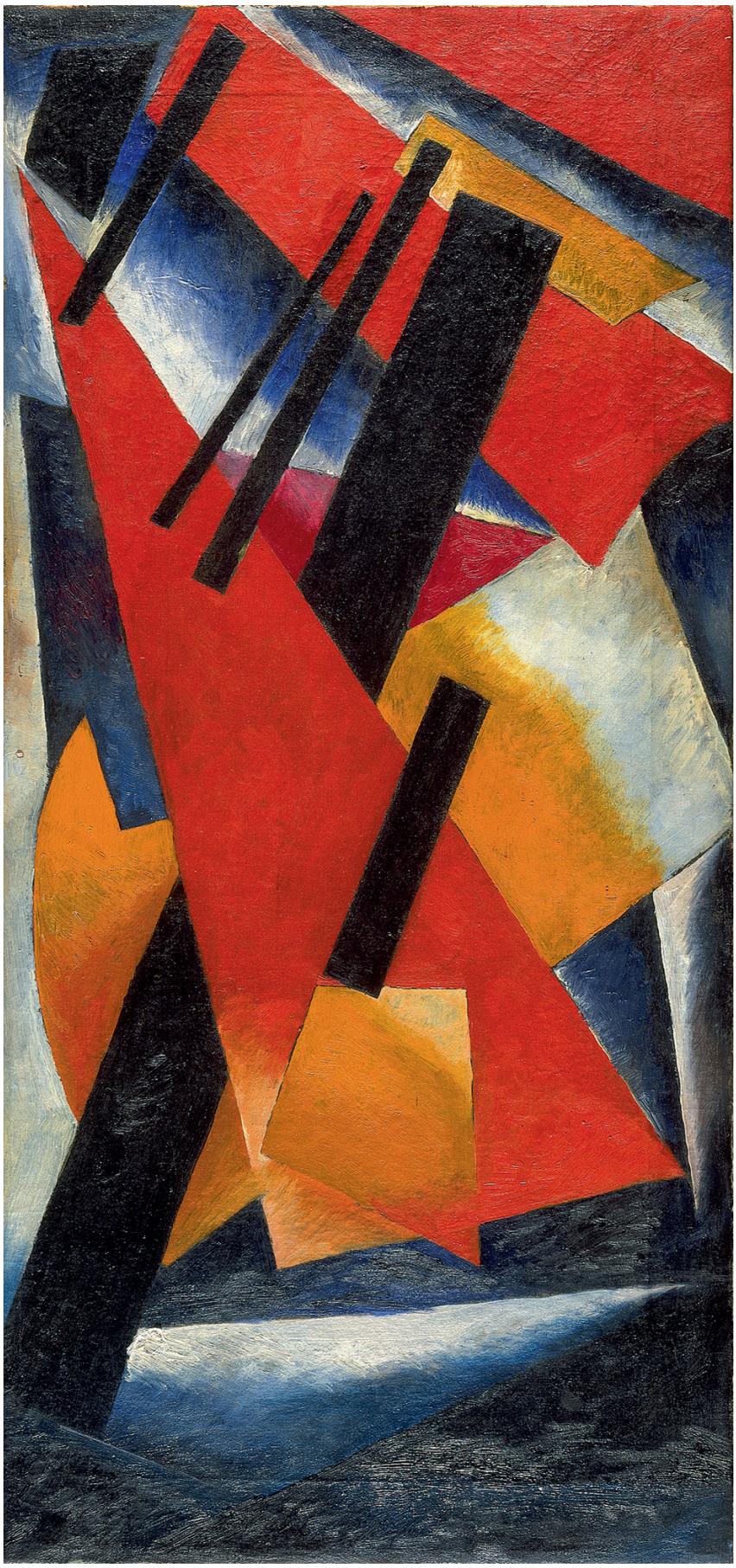
THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART



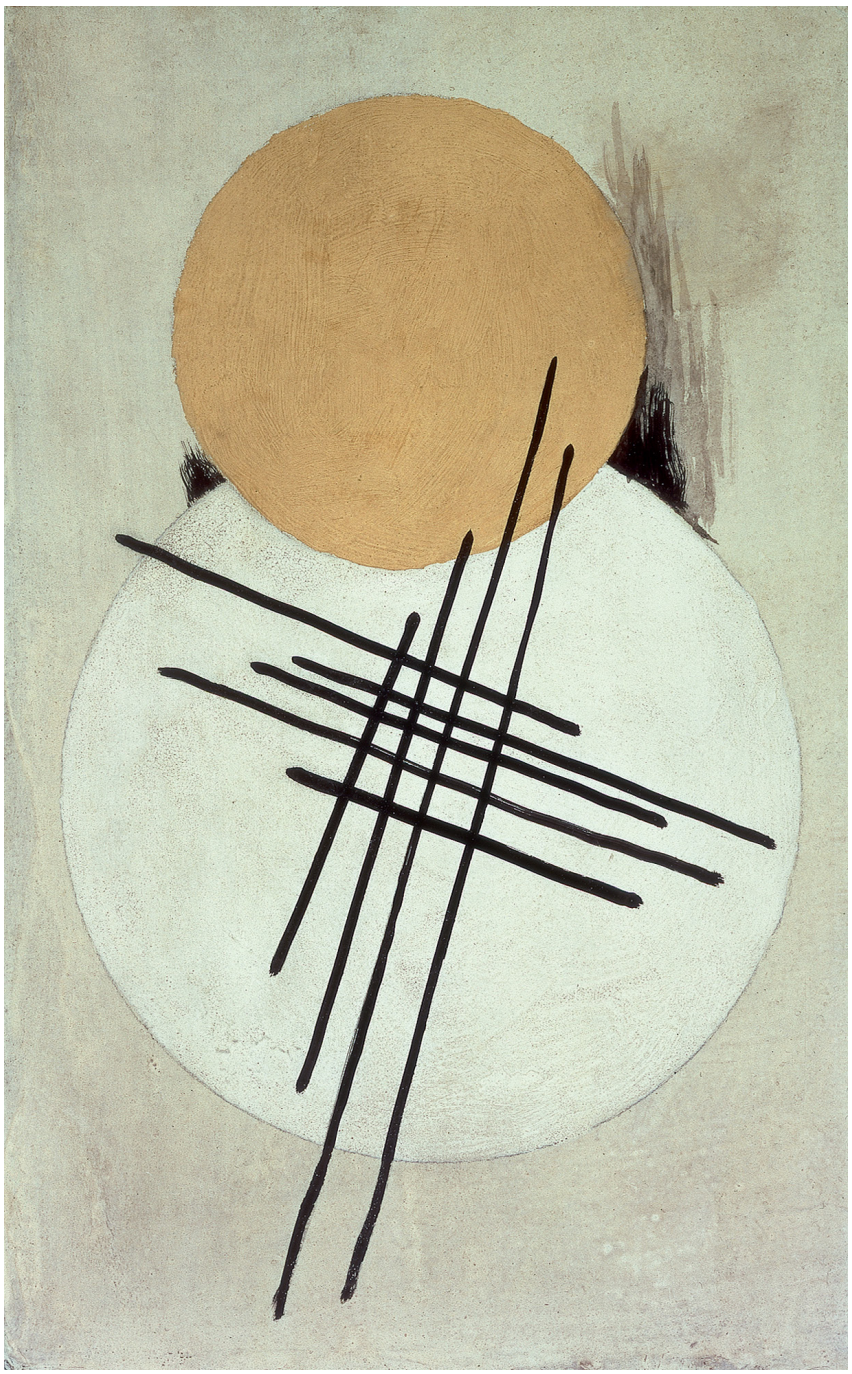
THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
NEW YORK

LIUBOV POPOVA

Non-Objective Composition 1916-17
oil on canvas
72.5 x 34.5 cm



Non-Objective Composition 1916-17
oil on canvas
72.5 x 34.5 cm

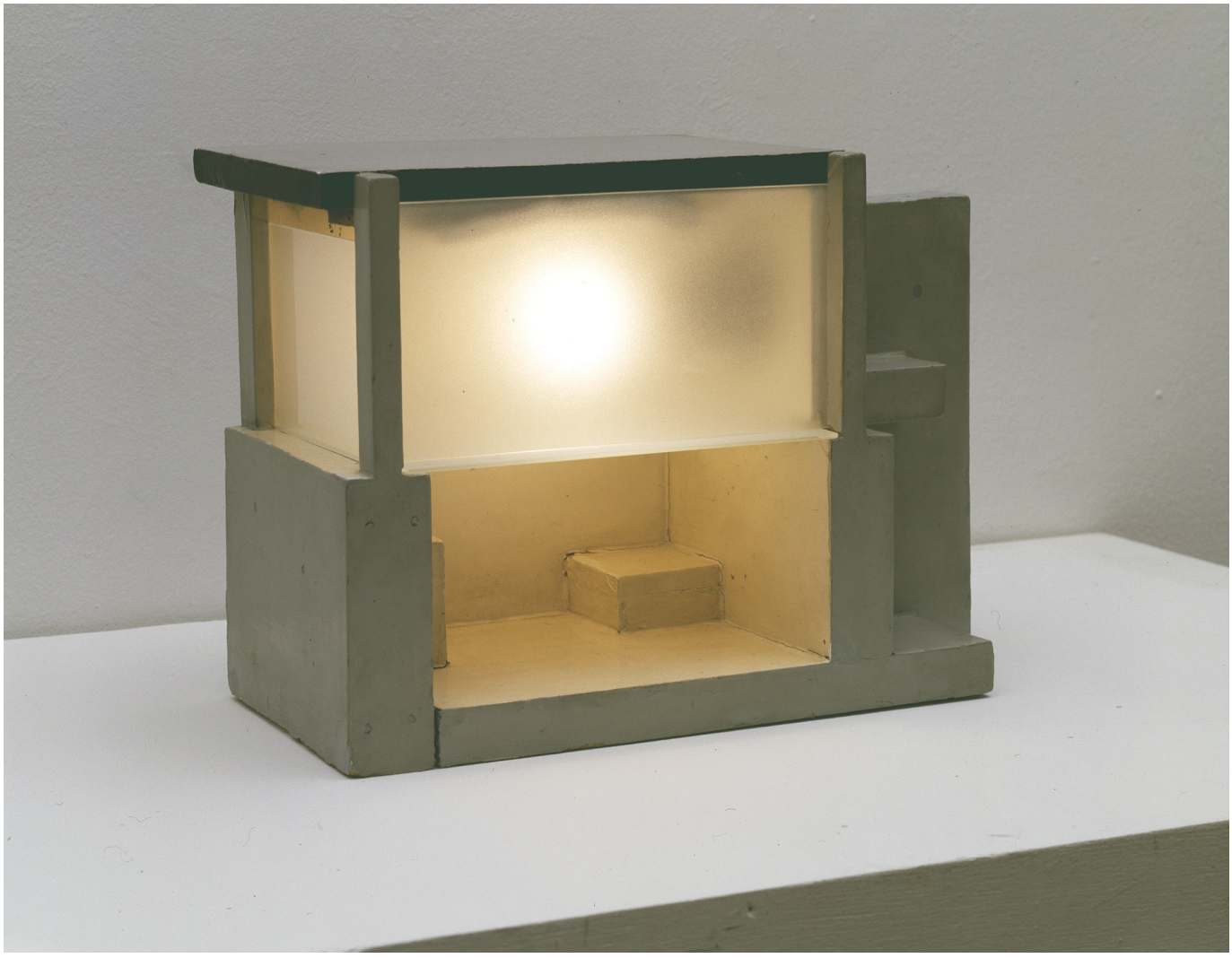


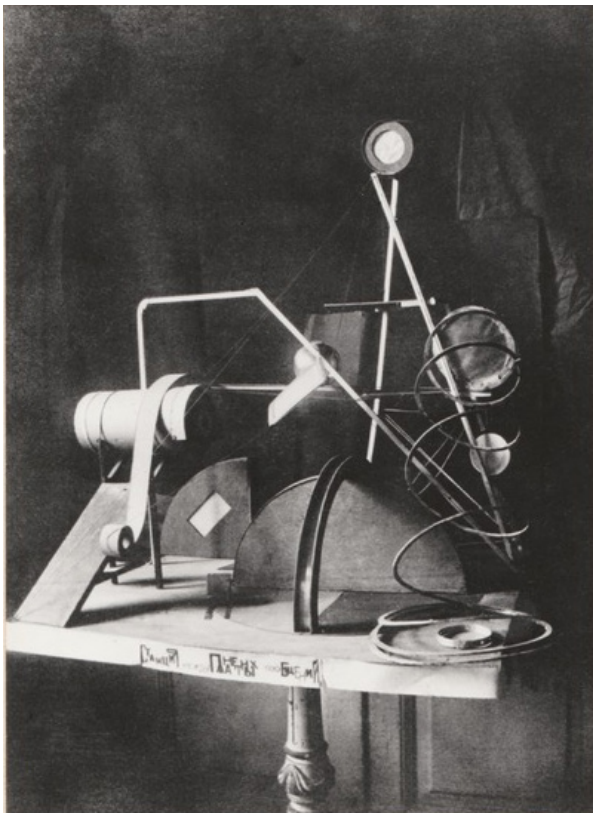
Abstract Composition 1920-21
oil on wood panel
68.7 x 59.6 cm



GEORGES VANTONGERLOO

Desk lamp 1926
painted wood, glass and electric light
20 x 28 x 15 cm





Project for an interplanetary station, author unknown,
Moscow SVOMAS (Free studios) c. 1920-21

ARTISTS' BIOGRAPHIES

Mariana Bisti

Born in Greece, 1981
Lives and works in London and Athens

David Greene

Born in Nottingham, 1937
Lives and works in London

Tadashi Kawamata

Born in Hokkaido, 1953
Lives and works in Tokyo and Paris

Gustav Klucis

Born in Latvia, 1895
Died in Moscow, 1938

Lazar El Lissitzky

Born in Russia, 1890
Died in Moscow, 1941

Kasimir Malevich

Born in Kiev, 1879
Died in St Petersburg, 1935

László Moholy-Nagy

Born in Hungary, 1895
Died in Chicago, 1946

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Born in Loughborough, 1967
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Born in Tokyo, 1956
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Born in Colombia, 1956
Lives and works in London

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Born in Antwerp, 1886
Died in Paris, 1965

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Born in London, 1953
Lives and works in London

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Born in London, 1953
Lives and works in London





photo credits:

Mariana Bisti: Courtesy of the artist
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David Greene: Courtesy of Archigram Archives
Mike Nelson: Installation view, Galleria Franco Noero, Torino, 2017. Photo: Sebastiano Pellion di Persano. Courtesy the artist and 303 Gallery, New York; Galleria Franco Noero, Turin; Matt's Gallery, London; and neugerriemschneider, Berlin.
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