

LISSITZKY +

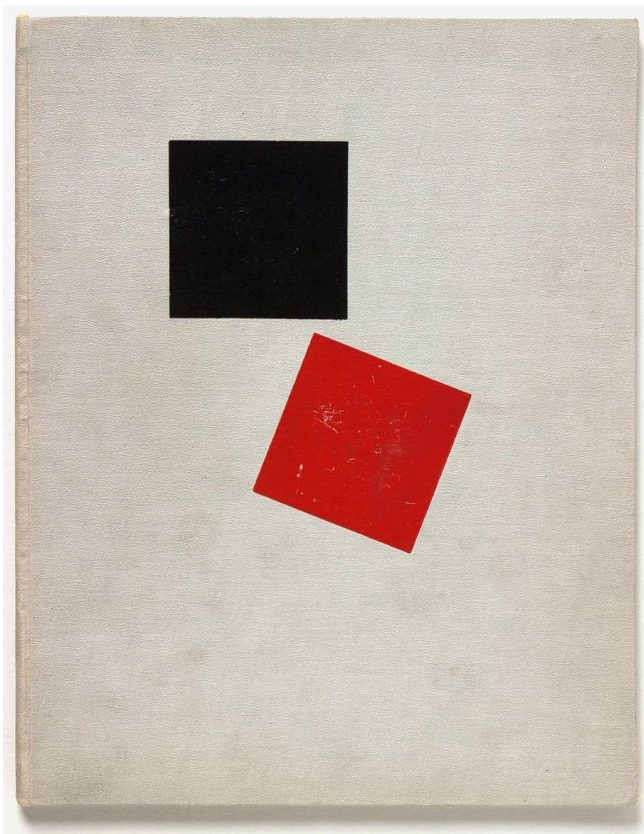
Part 1 – Victory over the Sun

19/09/2009 – 05/09/2010

In September the Van Abbemuseum is launching the large-scale, three-year *Lissitzky+* project, in which the museum will be casting new light on its renowned Lissitzky collection. This takes the form of a triptych of exhibitions, each exploring a particular theme, continuing through 2012. The first part, *Lissitzky+, Victory over the Sun*, opens on 19 September 2009. It is the first time the museum has staged such a presentation of Lissitzky's wide-ranging oeuvre, for which a whole floor of the Van Abbemuseum's new building has been specially rearranged. The museum holds the largest collection of Lissitzky's work outside Russia.

A rich collection and unique loans

El (Lazar Markovich) Lissitzky (1890-1941) was an architect, painter, graphic artist, a designer of furniture, books and posters, a writer, theatre producer and photographer. He was also an indefatigable traveller, the official cultural ambassador for the new Soviet Russia, and the prototype of the networking, ubiquitously active artist. In the 1920s and '30s he collaborated closely with many major artists, such as Kasimir Malevich, Hans Arp, Kurt Schwitters, László Moholy-Nagy and Theo van Doesburg.



Suprematist story of two squares, publication Skify Berlin, 1922. Design El Lissitzky.
Photo Peter Cox

The Van Abbemuseum has invited a leading authority on the Russian avant-garde Professor John Milner of the Courtauld Institute, London to curate *Lissitzky+*. The first project takes the futurist opera, *Victory over the Sun*, as its

starting point. After the second staging of this opera in 1920, Lissitzky hatched plans to mechanize the work and produced drawings and prints of his proposals that are held in the museum's collection.

The *Victory over the Sun* exhibition draws extensively on the Van Abbemuseum's collection and includes major works from other museums, such as the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, the Centre Pompidou in Paris and the State Museum of Contemporary Art in Thessaloniki. These institutions and others are loaning work by contemporaries such as Marc Chagall, Kasimir Malevich and Lyubov Popova. Several paintings by Malevich have not been exhibited for many years and some of his drawings are to be shown in the Netherlands for the first time. The entire exhibition includes 81 works by Lissitzky and 25 works by his contemporaries, of which 31 works are on loan.

Lissitzky in three dimensions

The Van Abbemuseum is the first institution ever to have rendered important designs by Lissitzky as a large-scale, three-dimensional figures, wholly in keeping with Lissitzky's ideological legacy. Many of Lissitzky's designs and drawings were regarded as utopian fantasies. However, Milner discovered that many of these designs were indeed intended for actual realisation, and with this exhibition that is being fulfilled for the very first time. Milner about this: 'At one point, Lissitzky writes "I am not going to do this. You can do this." I started looking at his work and thinking: "What is he suggesting? What is the potential of these things?" When you look at a little lithograph for instance you begin to see that it is essentially city planning or architecture, so this gave us the chance to make some models to see what they would look like. We are not making 'fake Lissitzkys'; but trying to convey the idea that there is a proposition here, that you can change the world and this is how you can do it. We're just taking it forward a step.'

One example is the *Suprematist story of two squares* (1922), which is part of the Van Abbemuseum's collection. For the exhibition – in line with Lissitzky's vision and ideas

and, moreover, standing alongside the original work – the squares have been rendered as two cubes (one red and one black), and thus as architecture. The book in which the image is found was published in Russian in 1922, and shortly thereafter a Dutch-language version was produced by De Stijl. The museum's director, Charles Esche, formulates the underlying concept as follows: 'Every time you see such a flat drawing of two squares you have to imagine as well that you can walk between those forms, like in a city. Or that you could live in there, in various rooms. We are keen to bring these ideas to the fore.'

Equally spectacular is the eye-catching *Gravediggers* sculpture, which has been standing more than eight metres tall in the museum's lake since 27 August 2009. It was constructed using various types of metal.



Gravediggers, after design by Lissitzky, Van Abbemuseum, 2009. Photo Perry van Duijnhoven

The *New Man* is also a key work that is typical of the art of post-revolution Russia and is reminiscent of Da Vinci's *Universal Man*. Following an extensive exploration of the designs and sketches, Milner has realized the work in a large format. This 'new work' occupies a central place in the exhibition, hung at the window in the museum's stairwell.

A larger-than-life model of his renowned *Wolkenbügel* (Cloudprop) design has also been built, providing a wonderful insight into this skyscraper structure, which is simultaneously an embodiment of Lissitzky's ideas about the social import of architecture.

Lissitzky as a cornerstone for the Van Abbemuseum

For director Charles Esche, Lissitzky's oeuvre serves as the cornerstone of his policy at the Van Abbemuseum:

'Lissitzky is one of the most attractive components of the museum's collection and an intriguing model for contemporary artists, because he is engaged with the world as well as his own artistic vision. From Lissitzky you can understand that artists have always risked connecting to society and contributing to its development.'

Publication

The exhibitions are accompanied by a publication written by John Milner, providing instructive and novel insights into Lissitzky's oeuvre. Milner places Lissitzky's work, ideology and vision in an historical and art-historical context, setting it alongside the work of contemporaries such as Kasimir Malevich, Vladimir Tatlin, Mart Stam and Gerrit Rietveld.

Looking ahead

The second exhibition (September 2010 to September 2011) in the *Lissitzky+* project presents Lissitzky's work alongside work by several radical female artists with whom he collaborated. The third part (September 2011 to September 2012) focuses on the dynamic human figure.

Curator

The project's guest curator is John Milner; the project manager at the Van Abbemuseum is Willem Jan Renders.

Sponsors

The models of the figures from *Victory over the Sun* have been realised with support of Rotary Club Eindhoven Soeterbeek. The *Gravediggers* statue has been realised with support of MCB Nederland.

Note to Editors

Further information and images can be downloaded via:
www.vanabbemuseum.nl/pers.

The press presentation is on Thursday, 17 September 2009 at 11.00.

For further information, visual materials, interviews and/or press registration, please contact 'Claire Beke - Communicatie in Cultuur', T: +31 (0)10 425 03 44 or e-mail: pressoffice@lissitzkyplus.com

Press release
September 2009

The Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven is one of the first public museums for contemporary art to be established in Europe. The museum's collection of around 2700 works of art includes key works and archives by Lissitzky, Picasso, Kokoschka, Chagall, Beuys, McCarthy, Daniëls and Kórmeling. The museum has an experimental approach towards art's role in society. Openness, hospitality and knowledge exchange are important. We challenge ourselves and our visitors to think about art and its place in the world, covering a range of subjects, including the role of the collection as a cultural 'memory' and the museum as a public site. International collaboration and exchange have made the Van Abbemuseum a place for creative cross-fertilisation and a source of surprise, inspiration and imagination for its visitors and participants..

Van Abbemuseum

Bilderdijklaan 10
Eindhoven

Opening hours

Tues.–Sun., 11.00–17.00

Thurs., 11.00–21.00

On Thursdays the museum remains open until 21.00 and from 17.00 admission is free.

Admission

Adults: € 8.50

Groups ▶15 / 65+: € 6.00

Students / CJP cardholders: € 4.00

Thursday evenings, 17.00–21.00: free admission (until 31/10/09)

For further information visit: www.vanabbemuseum.nl