

NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

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MALEVICH EXHIBITION TO OPEN AT NATIONAL GALLERY

Washington, D.C., June 18, 1990 -- The largest and most comprehensive retrospective ever held in America of the work of Russian artist Kazimir Malevich will begin a United States tour at the National Gallery of Art on September 16 through November 4, 1990. The exhibition Kazimir Malevich, 1878-1935 will present approximately 170 paintings, works on paper, and architectural models from museums in the U.S.S.R., the U.S.A., the Netherlands, and France. Best known for his abstract "Suprematist" works, Malevich also worked in styles as diverse as impressionism, symbolism, neo-primitivism, and cubo-futurism. All phases of his artistic career, including his late return to figurative painting, will be featured in the exhibition.

The exhibition was organized by the National Gallery of Art, the Armand Hammer Museum of Art and Cultural Center, and The Metropolitan Museum of Art, following an initiative by Dr. Armand Hammer.

The exhibition at the National Gallery is made possible by Philip Morris Companies Inc.

"We are pleased to be opening this historic tour of works by one of the twentieth century's most extraordinary and influential artists," said J. Carter Brown, director of the National Gallery. "Like Kandinsky and Mondrian, Malevich created a new abstract language. His signature work Black Square of 1915 was at the time the most uncompromisingly nonobjective painting ever produced."

"The cooperative spirit that led to this exhibition demonstrates the shared understandings made possible through art," said Hamish Maxwell, chairman and chief executive officer of Philip Morris Companies Inc. "Malevich's achievements bear out our company's faith in creativity and innovation. We feel privileged to sponsor this major retrospective in our nation's capital."

Recognized as one of the seminal figures of modern art, Malevich has been better known to the public through publications rather than firsthand. In 1988-1989 an internationally heralded exhibition held in Leningrad, Moscow, and Amsterdam assembled the widest range of Malevich's work ever shown. Drawn from the holdings of the State Russian Museum in Leningrad, the Tretyakov Gallery in Moscow, and the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, it marked the first occasion in nearly six decades that an exhibition of Malevich's work had been seen in his own land. In addition to generous loans from these three collections, the National Gallery exhibition will offer a significantly altered selection, including several major works from American museums and important additions from Soviet sources.

Like the art of other members of the Russian avant-garde, Malevich's abstract idiom was increasingly regarded as ideologically alien in the political climate of the 1920s and early 1930s. After his death in 1935, his work was relegated to storage in Soviet museums. The inaccessibility of much of this work, combined with Malevich's own problematic dating of his paintings, has concerned scholars seeking to establish the chronology of his career. Kazimir Malevich, 1878-1935 will reflect new thinking on this issue.

Born in Ukraine in 1878, Malevich received his early art training at the Kiev Academy. At the age of 29 he moved to Moscow where he made contact with the progressive group led by Natalya Goncharova and Mikhail Larionov. Their neo-primitive style, rooted in Russian folk art, profoundly influenced his 1910-1911 paintings of peasant themes. Connections between the Moscow avant-garde and developments in western Europe were strong. Sergei Shchukin's and Ivan Morosov's growing collections of works by Cézanne, Picasso, and Matisse were studied by young Russian artists, and the works of fauve, expressionist, cubist, and futurist artists were included in several Moscow exhibitions and publications. By 1912, Goncharova, Malevich, and others had begun to organize exhibitions that made a significant break with these European links, asserting a distinctively Russian direction to their art.

Malevich soon broke with this group and the pace of his independent growth toward a new aesthetic intensified. Several of Malevich's highly original "cubo-futurist" works of 1913-1914 were shown at an exhibition in early 1915, and within only a few months, he had produced 35 totally abstract paintings based upon what he called his "Suprematist" system. These early suprematist compositions, consisting of roughly geometrical elements unified on white surfaces, were presented to the public for the first time in December 1915.

Suprematism was among the most active movements initially supporting the 1917 Revolution. But by the early 1920s conflicts intensified between the Suprematists and the reactionary artistic forces that favored "Socialist Realist" art. In a climate of increasing intimidation, Malevich produced few paintings between 1920 and 1927.

However, Malevich continued to have a following abroad, and in 1927 he was invited to bring a large exhibition of his work to Warsaw and Berlin. Upon his return to Leningrad, he left this group of paintings, drawings, architectural models and a substantial collection of his writings in Germany. Later acquired by several western museums, primarily the Stedelijk in Amsterdam, these paintings have provided virtually the sole basis for the West's exposure to Malevich's art.

Back in Russia Malevich embarked upon a final phase of intense activity, producing a new group of figurative works. Examined within the context of his development, these late works express a new aesthetic, informed by the spirit of suprematism.

Angelica Zander Rudenstine, the consulting curator for Kazimir Malevich, 1878-1935, developed the modified concept for the American exhibition and the revised chronological installation at the National Gallery. Marla Prather, National Gallery assistant curator of twentieth-century art, is coordinating the exhibition at the National Gallery.

Philip Morris Companies Inc. began its support of the arts in 1958. Since then, the company has developed one of the most comprehensive corporate cultural programs. Through its broad spectrum of sponsorship, Philip Morris promotes contemporary and minority visual and performing arts, as well as major international exhibitions and tours. Kazimir Malevich, 1878-1935 is the third exhibition to be supported by Philip Morris at the National Gallery; the first was The Age of Sultan Suleyman the Magnificent in 1987; the second, Treasures from the Fitzwilliam Museum in 1989.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION about the exhibition, please contact either Ruth Kaplan or Katie Ziglar, National Gallery of Art, (202) 842-6353. For information about Philip Morris Companies Inc. and its support of the exhibition, please contact Alan Cohen, Rogers & Cowan, Inc., (212) 490-8200.