



PRESS INFORMATION

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GETTY ACQUIRES ARCHIVE OF NOTED RUSSIAN ARTIST EL LISSITZKY

**Collection of Letters, Documents, and Photographs Available for
Scholarly Research for the First Time**

SANTA MONICA, Calif. -- The Getty Center for the History of Art and the Humanities announced today a major new acquisition of original manuscripts and photographs from the personal archive of El Lissitzky (1890-1941), one of the most influential artists of the early twentieth-century Russian avant-garde. The archive includes 126 detailed letters written by Lissitzky to his wife, art historian Sophie Lissitzky-Küppers between 1922 and 1941--many previously unknown to scholars. Together, they chronicle Lissitzky's varied artistic activities and offer insight into the couple's professional partnership. Other personal documents include address books that show the range of Lissitzky's international contacts; an original inventory of his work; and numerous documentary photographs of his landmark exhibition designs.

According to Salvatore Settis, director of the Getty Center for the History of Art and the Humanities, "The Lissitzky archive will provide a rich new source of information for scholars with a general interest in twentieth-century art and architectural history, as well as typography and exhibition design. We are pleased to make these little-known materials accessible to the scholarly and academic community and hope they will inspire new publications and exhibitions."

Trained as an architect, El Lissitzky was a highly inventive artist who worked in many media, including photography, the book arts, and exhibition design, as well as writing critical essays on modern art. He spent much of his career in Europe, where he communicated the ideals of the Russian avant-garde, whose synthesis of painting, architecture, and graphic art expressed the utopian vision of the Revolution.

Inspired by the abstract, Suprematist paintings of his teacher Kazimir Malevich, Lissitzky invented a new form of abstract composition that he called Proun (an acronym for Project for the Affirmation of the New). These works consisted of arrangements of colored geometric forms, intended to suggest architectural structures floating in space. Lissitzky considered Prouns to be a "half-way station between painting and architecture," which epitomized the aesthetic of Russian Constructivism. Widely reproduced in books and journals, Prouns influenced the work of many leading European modernists.

The core of the Getty's new acquisition is the group of 126 autograph letters to Sophie Lissitzky-Küppers, with the largest

number written in Germany, Switzerland, and Moscow during the years 1922 through 1930. They contain rich, evocative descriptions of Lissitzky's ongoing projects (articles, architectural competitions, book design, typography), his views of fellow artists (Malevich, Klee, Arp, Tatlin, Gropius), sketches of Prouns, and drawings for his own children. The stationery bears his famous letterhead in drawn and printed form. Lissitzky was often separated from Sophie Küppers and his letters also reveal much about the circumstances of his daily life.

Another important portion of the archive is a group of rare photographs documenting Lissitzky's designs for international exhibitions from the late 1920s and 1930s. The photographs show Lissitzky's application of principles of Russian Constructivism to exhibition design. They also reveal his skillful use of propaganda to promote the Russian state. As a group, his designs can be studied for their innovative role in the history of modern exhibition design.

The collection stands with archives in the Tretyakov Gallery in Moscow, and the Van Abbe Museum in Eindhoven in the Netherlands, as one of the three most important archival collections on Lissitzky in the world and the largest one to be held in the United States.

The Lissitzky collection is complemented by several other holdings at the Center. One of the most significant is an archive of drawings, prints, textiles, and sketches by students and faculty of VKhUTEMAS, the Higher State Artistic and Technical Workshops, where Lissitzky taught in the 1920s. In addition, the archive of

German typographer Jan Tschichold contains many letters from Lissitzky as well as tearsheets and photographs that Lissitzky sent as examples for publication in Tschichold's books on new typography. Finally, the Center's extensive Russian book collection includes examples of the publications designed by Lissitzky, many of which are discussed in his letters to Sophie Küppers.

The Getty Center for the History of Art and the Humanities, an operating program of the J. Paul Getty Trust, is an institution dedicated to advanced research in the history of art, broadly defined as an integral part of human history and society. Its goals are to cross the traditional boundaries imposed on academic institutions and to bring together scholars from around the world to reexamine the meaning of art and artifacts within past and present cultures and to reassess their importance within the full scope of the humanities and social sciences.

The J. Paul Getty Trust is the only foundation of its kind in the world combining so many aspects of the visual arts and humanities. Through the activities of six operating programs and a grant program, and through collaborative projects with institutions locally and around the world, the Getty seeks to make a valuable contribution to the vitality of the visual arts and humanities in the areas of scholarship, conservation, and education. The Getty programs are the J. Paul Getty Museum, the Getty Center for the History of Art and the Humanities, the Getty Conservation Institute, the Getty Art History Information Program, the Getty Center for Education in the Arts, the Museum Management Institute, and the Getty Grant Program.

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El Lissitzky
(1890 - 1941)

Biographical Notes

El Lissitzky, born in 1890 at Pochinok near Smolensk, was part of Russia's Jewish middle-class. In 1909 he traveled to Germany to study architecture at the Technische Hochschule in Darmstadt. In 1914, Lissitzky returned to Russia, continuing his studies in Moscow and attending the Riga Polytechnical Institute. After the Revolution, Lissitzky became very active in Jewish cultural activities, creating illustrations for books with Jewish themes. In 1919, he was invited by Marc Chagall to teach architecture and graphics at the Vitebsk Art School. There Lissitzky was influenced by faculty-member Kazimir Malevich's method of Suprematism, a form of abstract painting in which colored planes hover in space over a neutral ground.

Before moving to Germany in late 1921, Lissitzky became a member of Moscow's INKhUK (Institute of Artistic Culture) and joined the faculty of VKhUTEMAS (The Higher State Artistic and Technical Workshops). Living in Berlin and later in Hanover, Lissitzky became a Russian representative to avant-garde artists in the West. With writer Ilia Erenburg, he published a tri-lingual journal on modern art titles Vesch/Object/Gegenstand. He also collaborated on journal issues and book designs with Mies van der Rohe, Kurt Schwitters, and Hans Arp.

In 1925, Lissitzky moved back to Russia where he taught in the Wood and Metalwork faculty of the Moscow VKhUTEMAS. In addition, he continued work on various typographical projects; theater, furniture, and exhibition designs; and participated in various architectural competitions. Lissitzky was closely associated with the editorial board of the propaganda magazine, USSR in Construction, contributing layout designs and photomontages for a number of commemorative issues devoted to the Stalinist Constitution, Soviet Georgia, and the Red Army.



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**GETTY CENTER FOR THE HISTORY OF ART AND THE HUMANITIES
RECEIVES NATIONAL ARCHITECTURE BOOK AWARD**

SANTA MONICA, Calif. -- The American Institute of Architects has awarded the Getty Center for the History of Art and the Humanities a Citation for Excellence in International Architecture Book Publishing. The "Series" award, the only such honor given this year by the AIA, recognizes two of the Center's ongoing book series: "Texts & Documents," in particular the volumes Friedrich Gilly: Essays on Architecture 1796-1799, and Style-Architecture and Building-Art by Hermann Muthesius; and "Issues & Debates," in particular the volume Otto Wagner: Reflections on the Raiment of Modernity.

Each year the American Institute of Architects honors excellence in architecture book publishing around the world. This year, a total of 21 publishers from seven countries were recognized with a Citation for Excellence. The 1995 jury, chaired by Philip C. Johnson, FAIA, included Michael Graves, James Stewart Polshek, Robert A.M. Stern, Hugh Hardy, and John Ray Hoke, Jr. The citations were presented today at an awards reception at the Museum of Modern Art in New York.

Published by the Getty Center for the History of Art and the Humanities, the "Texts & Documents" series offers translations of seminal texts previously unavailable in English. Each volume is edited by noted scholars and framed by critical introductions and commentaries. Friedrich Gilly: Essays on Architecture 1796-1799, introduction by Fritz Neumeier, presents five newly translated essays by the influential 18th-century German architect. Style-Architecture and Building-Art, with an introduction by Stanford Anderson, is the first English translation of Hermann Muthesius 1902 manifesto on early European modernism.

The aim of the "Issues & Debates" book series is to expose the historical study of artifacts to a rigorous debate by scholars of different perspectives and disciplinary approaches, thus raising new questions of interpretation. Otto Wagner: Reflections on the Raiment of Modernity, presents ten critical essays about the Austrian architect that create a more accurate portrait of his career by considering seemingly contradictory aspects of his later work and theories. The editors of the Publications Program of the Getty Center for the History of Art and the Humanities are Julia Bloomfield, assistant director, Thomas F. Reese, deputy director, and Salvatore Settis, director.

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The J. Paul Getty Trust is a private operating foundation devoted to the visual arts and humanities. The Trust's programs are the Getty Center for the History of Art and the Humanities, the J. Paul Getty Museum, the Getty Center for Education in the Arts, the Getty Conservation Institute, the Getty Grant Program, the Museum Management Institute, and the Getty Art History Information Program.

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