

**Russian Art
of the Avant-Garde
Theory and Criticism
1902-1934**

**Edited and Translated
by John E. Bowlt**

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VI.

Toward Socialist Realism

ИСКУССТВО

СССР



А — Х — Р — Р

A decorative horizontal line with a sawtooth or zigzag pattern, spanning the width of the text above it.

Cover of the book *Iskusstvo SSSR* [Art U.S.S.R.], published by AKhRR, Moscow, 1926. Designed by Boris Titov.

AKhRR

Declaration

of the Association of Artists of Revolutionary Russia, 1922

Shortly after the forty-seventh exhibition of the Wanderers, in January 1922, a group of artists, among them Aleksandr Grigorev, Evgenii Katsman, Sergei Malyutin, and Pavel Radimov, organized the Assotsiatsiya khudozhnikov, izuchayushchikh revolyutsionnyi byt [Association of Artists Studying Revolutionary Life], which was shortly rechristened Obshchestvo khudozhnikov revolyutsionnoi Rossii [Society of Artists of Revolutionary Russia]. After their first group show, "Exhibition of Pictures by Artists of the Realist Direction in Aid of the Starving," in Moscow (opened May 1), the Society was renamed Assotsiatsiya khudozhnikov revolyutsionnoi Rossii [AKhRR—Association of Artists of Revolutionary Russia]. The primary aim of its members was to present Revolutionary Russia in a realistic manner by depicting the everyday life of the proletariat, the peasantry, the Red Army, etc. In restoring tendentious theme to the picture, they returned to the traditions of the nineteenth-century realists and declared their opposition to the leftists. In addition to older realists, such as Abram Arkhipov, Nikolai Kasatkin, and Konstantin Yuon, AKhRR attracted many young artists, such as Isaak Brodsky, Aleksandr Gerasimov, and Boris Ioganson. In order to acquaint themselves with proletarian reality, many of the AKhRR members visited factories, iron foundries, railroad depots, shipyards, etc. By the mid-1920s AKhRR was the most influential single body of artists in Russia, having affiliates throughout the country, including a special young artists' section called OMAKhR [Obedinenie molodezhi AKhR—Association of AKhR youth], its own publishing house [see bibl. R513], and of course, enjoying direct government support. In 1928 AKhRR changed its name to Assotsiatsiya khudozhnikov revolyutsii [AKhR—Association of Artists of the Revolution], and in 1929 it established its own journal *Iskusstvo v massy* [Art to the Masses] [bibl. R70]. In 1932, together with all other formal art and literary groups, AKhR was dissolved by the decree "On the Reconstruction" (see pp. 288ff.).

The text of this piece, "Deklaratsiya Assotsiatsii khudozhnikov revolyutsionnoi Rossii," was published in the catalogue of the AKhRR "Exhibition of Studies, Sketches, Drawings, and Graphics from the Life and Customs of the Workers' and Peasants' Red Army," in Moscow in June and July 1922, p. 120. It is reprinted in *Sovetskoe iskusstvo za 15 let* [Soviet Art of the Last Fifteen Years], ed. Ivan Matsa et al. (Moscow-Leningrad, 1933), p. 345 [bibl. R16], from which this translation is made, and also in bibl. R493, p. 289.



Evgenii Katsman: *Listening (Members of the Communist Faction from the Village of Baranovka)*, 1925. Charcoal. Collection Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow. Katsman's classical approach to anatomy and perspective enabled him to record many everyday scenes of workers and peasants in a highly intelligible if rather static manner.

The Great October Revolution, in liberating the creative forces of the people, has aroused the consciousness of the masses and the artists—the spokesmen of the people's spiritual life.

Our civic duty before mankind is to set down, artistically and documentarily, the revolutionary impulse of this great moment of history.

We will depict the present day: the life of the Red Army, the workers, the peasants, the revolutionaries, and the heroes of labor.

We will provide a true picture of events and not abstract concoctions discrediting our Revolution in the face of the international proletariat.

The old art groups existing before the Revolution have lost their meaning, the boundaries between them have been erased in regard to both ideology and form—and they continue to exist merely as circles of people linked together by personal connections but devoid of any ideological basis or content.

It is this content in art that we consider a sign of truth in a work of art, and the desire to express this content induces us, the artists of Revolutionary Russia, to join forces; the tasks before us are strictly defined.



Isaak Brodsky: *Lenin Giving a Farewell Speech to Detachments of the Red Army about to Leave for the Polish Front on May 5, 1920*, 1933. Oil on canvas, 280 x 422 cm. Collection Central Lenin Museum, Moscow.

The day of revolution, the moment of revolution, is the day of heroism, the moment of heroism—and now we must reveal our artistic experiences in the monumental forms of the style of heroic realism.

By acknowledging continuity in art and by basing ourselves on the contemporary world view, we create this style of heroic realism and lay the foundation of the universal building of future art, the art of a classless society.

AKhRR
The Immediate Tasks of AKhRR:
A Circular to All Branches of
AKhRR—An Appeal
to All the Artists
of the U.S.S.R.,¹ 1924

The text of this piece, "Ocherednye zadachi AKhRRa," was issued as a circular letter in May 1924, after the February exhibition "Revolution, Life, and Labor," and was then published in a collection of articles edited by an AKhRR member, Aleksandr Grigorev, *Chetyre goda AKhRRa* [Four Years of AKhRR] (Moscow, 1926), pp. 10–13. The text is reprinted in *Sovetskoe iskusstvo za 15 let* [Soviet Art of the Last Fifteen Years], ed. Ivan Matsu et al. (Moscow-Leningrad, 1933), pp. 345–48 [bibl. R16], from which this translation is made, and in bibl. R493, pp. 300–302.

The presidium of AKhRR and its Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks) faction consider it essential—on the second anniversary of the Association of Artists of Revolutionary Russia (May 1, 1924)—to sum up its artistic and social activities and to define its ideological policy in its subsequent practical work, once the immediate tasks facing AKhRR have been solved.

From the very beginning of AKhRR's existence, when it proclaimed in its declaration the need for a creative response to the October Revolution and for a new reality in visual art, it has been quite clear that AKhRR should take the organization of the new elements of social art organically linked to our revolutionary epoch as the basis of its artistic work, and that it should do this by regenerating art on the foundation of a high and authentic level of painterly skill.

The creation of the elements of a social art in the Russian school acted, by the very fact of its existence, as a logical balance to the development of, and enthusiasm for, the extreme, so-called leftist trends in art; it displayed their petty-bourgeois, pre-Revolutionary, decadent substance, which was expressed in their attempt to transfer the fractured forms of Western art—mainly French (Cézanne, Derain, Picasso)—to a soil alien both economically and psychologically.

In no way does this signify that we should ignore all the formal achievements of French art in the second half of the nineteenth century and to a certain extent in the first quarter of the twentieth within the general treasury of world art (the careful, serious study and assimilation of the painterly and formal achievements of modern art is an essential obligation of every serious artist who aspires to become a master). AKhRR objects only to the aspiration to reduce the whole development of art to the imitation and repetition of models of the French school, a school that is nurtured, in turn, on the sources of old traditions in art.

After their two years of work in factories and plants, after the many exhibitions they organized—which laid the foundation for the Museum of the All-Union Central Council of Trade Unions and for the Red Army and Navy Museum—the main group of AKhRR members felt convinced that subject matter, thematic method in the study and conversion of reality, was the main element in organizing form.

It became clear to the AKhRR artists that the factory, the plant, the production worker, electrification, the heroes of labor, the leaders of the Revolution, the new life of the peasants, the Red Army, the Komsomol and Pioneers, the death and funeral of the Revolution's leader—all this contained a new color of unprecedented power and severe fascination, a new interpretation of synthetic form, a new compositional structure; in a word, contained the aggregate of those conditions whose execution would regenerate easel and monumental painting.

For the expression of these new forms created by the Revolution, the frayed, lost forms and lacerated color hired from the masters of the French school are absolutely useless.

For the expression of these new forms created by the Revolution a new style is essential, a strong, precise, invigorating style that organizes thought and feeling, the style that in our short declaration is called heroic realism.

The difficulty of solving and realizing the above tasks lies in the fact that, while aspiring toward content in art, it is very easy to lapse into feeble, simple imitation of a host of outdated art schools and trends.

Those artists, those young artists who wish first and foremost to be sincere, who wish to shake off the yoke of vacuous philosophizing and inversion of the bases of visual art decomposed through the process of analysis, fully realize the necessity to regenerate the unity of form and content in art; and they direct all their strength, all their creative potential, to the ceaseless scientific and completely professional study of the new model, giving it the acutely realistic treatment that our epoch dictates.

The so-called indifference to politics of certain contemporary groups of

artists is a well or badly concealed aversion to the Revolution and a longing for a political and moral restoration.

The harsh material conditions that surround the present-day artist on the one hand deprive the artist of the protection of his professional interests and the safeguarding of his work and on the other hand determine his view of art as a weapon for the ideological struggle and clearly aggravate the difficulty of this path; but if the Revolution has triumphed, in spite of the innumerable obstacles, then the will to express the Revolution creatively will help the contemporary realist artist to overcome all the difficulties he encounters on his path.

It is essential to remember that a creative artistic expression of the Revolution is not a fruitless and driveling sentimentality toward it but a real service, because the creation of a revolutionary art is first and foremost the creation of an art that will have the honor of shaping and organizing the psychology of the generations to come.

Only now, after two years of AKhRR, after the already evident collapse of the so-called leftist tendencies in art, is it becoming clear that the artist of today must be both a master of the brush and a revolutionary fighting for the better future of mankind. Let the tragic figure of Courbet serve as the best prototype and reminder of the aims and tasks that contemporary art is called on to resolve.

The reproaches of formal weakness and dilettantism that were cast at the Wanderers by other art groups can by rights be repaid to those who made them, for if we remember the formal achievements of the best Wanderers (Perov, Surikov, Repin), we can see how much more profound, sincere, and serious they were than their descendants poisoned by the vacuous decorativeness, retrospectivism, and brittle decadence of the prerevolutionary era.

Kramskoi's prediction that the ideas of a social art would triumph under a different political regime is beginning to be brilliantly justified; it is confirmed by the mass withdrawal from all positions of the so-called leftist front observable in contemporary art.

Give particular attention to the young artists, organize them, turn all your efforts to giving polish to those natural artists from among the workers and peasants who are beginning to prove their worth in wall newspapers; and the hour is not far off when, perhaps, the Soviet art school will be destined to become the most original and most important factor in the renaissance of world art.

Ceaseless artistic self-discipline, ceaseless artistic self-perfection, unremitting effort in the preparations for the next AKhRR exhibition—this is the only path that will lead to the creation of a genuine, new art on whose

heights form will fuse with content. And the presidium of AKhRR and its Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks) faction appeal to all artists who hold near and dear the behests and aims set before AKhRR to rally around the association in a powerful, united, artistic, and revolutionary organization.

AKhR Declaration of the Association of Artists of the Revolution, 1928

For details on AKhR see p. 265.

The text of this piece, "Deklaratsiya Assotsiatsii khudozhnikov revolyutsii (AKhR)," was published in the *Bulletin* of the AKhR Information Office dedicated to the First All-Union Convention of AKhR. This convention was held just after the tenth exhibition of AKhRR/AKhR in Moscow, February 1928, which was devoted to ten years of the Workers' and Peasants' Red Army. The text is reprinted in *Sovetskoe iskusstvo za 15 let* [Soviet Art of the Last Fifteen Years], ed. Ivan Matsa et al. (Moscow-Leningrad, 1933), p. 356 [bibl. R16], from which this translation is made; the text is reprinted also in bibl. R493, pp. 320-21.

The Great October Revolution, having emancipated the forces of the worker and peasant masses, has summoned artists to participate in the class struggle and Socialist construction in the ranks of the proletariat and toiling peasantry.

"Art belongs to the people. With its deepest roots it should penetrate into the very thick of the toiling masses. It should be understood by these masses and loved by them" (Lenin).

As artists of the Proletarian Revolution, we have the duty of transforming the authentic revolutionary reality into realistic forms comprehensible to the broad masses of the workers and of participating actively in Socialist construction by our socioartistic work.

The tasks of artistically designing everyday life (architecture, clubs, lei-

sure, mass celebrations) and also of artistically finishing articles of mass consumption (duplicating designs, textiles, ceramics, the processing of wood, metal, etc.) confront the artists of the Proletarian Revolution as urgent, present-day tasks.

The heroic class struggle, the great workdays of construction, should be the mainsprings of the content of our art. The subjects of our immediate work are not only the past and present of the struggle, but also the prospects created by the Proletarian Revolution. We consider this profound content—invested in an artistically perfect, realistic form organically engendered by it—a sign of truth in a contemporary work of visual art.

In actively realizing the slogans of the cultural revolution on the visual-arts front, in organizing the feelings, thoughts, and will of the toiling masses by our artistic and social work, we set as our primary objective: to assist the proletariat in the realization of its class objectives.

In national cultures, October is creating a diverse but united current of revolutionary, realistic art of all republics and autonomous provinces of the U.S.S.R. This is also true of the art of revolutionary artists of other countries; ¹ and in setting as our task the development of keen artistic interaction between peoples liberated and those being liberated, we aspire to unite the revolutionary artists of all countries in a single organization—INTERNAKhR.

“Proletarian culture is not something that has come out of the blue; it is not the invention of people who call themselves specialists in proletarian culture. . . . Proletarian culture should be the *legitimate development* of the reserves of knowledge that mankind produced under the yoke of capitalist society, landowner society, and bureaucratic society.”

With these words of V. I. Lenin in mind, and on the basis of continuity and critical assimilation of world artistic culture, we will come to the creation of a proletarian art.

Advancing along this path, perfecting the forms of our language with persistent work and labor, we will come, by means of a new content, to the creation of a monumental style—the expression of our epoch, the style of heroic realism.

Art—to the masses.

October—Association of Artistic Labor Declaration, 1928

October was founded in 1928, but its one exhibition did not open until June 1930, in Moscow. October encompassed various artistic activities, although it concentrated on the industrial and applied arts—and this, together with its emphasis on the proletariat and on contemporaneity, recalled the ideas of Proletkult and constructivism. This is confirmed by the association's list of members and by the cosignatories of this declaration, who included: representing poster art and book design—Aleksandr Alekseev, Mecheslav Dobrokovsky, Vasilii Elkin, Paula Freiberg, Paul Irbis, Gustav Klutsis, Alois Kreichik, Nikolai Lapin, El Lissitzky, Dmitrii Moor, Diego Rivera (in Moscow 1927–28), Nikolai Sedelnikov, Sergei Senkin, Solomon Telingater, Béla Uitz, Viktor Toot and, temporarily, Aleksandr Deineka; representing architecture—Aleksandr Gan, Moisei Ginzburg, Pavel Novitsky, and two of the Vesnin brothers, Aleksandr and Viktor; representing film and photography—Sergei Eisenstein, Aleksandr Rodchenko, and Esfir Shub; and Alfred Kurella, Ivan Matsa, and Aleksei Mikhailov—theorists of the group.

Deineka, Klutsis, Lissitzky, Rodchenko, Senkin, and Varvara Stepanova were represented at its sole exhibition [for review see bibl. R70, no. 7, 1930, pp. 9–16]. A collection of October declarations and articles by members entitled *Izofront. Klassovaya borba na fronte prostranstvennykh iskusstv* [Visual Arts Front. The Class Struggle on the Spatial Arts Front; bibl. R500] was scheduled to appear at the same time as the exhibition, but the adverse political and artistic climate dictated a number of prepublication changes. When the collection finally appeared in late 1931, the publishers were careful to emphasize in their separate insert and apologetic preface that the collection was being published as “material for creative discussion” despite its numerous “vulgar, materialistic mistakes.” In 1932 October was accused of “abolishing art” [see responses of RAPKh (Rossiiskaya assotsiatsiya proletarskikh khudozhnikov—Russian Association of Proletarian Artists) to the decree “On the Reconstruction” (pp. 288ff.) in *Za proletarskoe iskusstvo* [For Proletarian Art] (Moscow), no. 9/10, 1932; reprinted in bibl. R16, p. 650]; in the same year October was, in any case, dissolved as a result of the above decree.

The text of this piece, “Oktyabr. Obedinenie khudozhestvennogo truda. Deklaratsiya,” was first published in *Sovremennaya arkhitektura* [SA—Contemporary Architecture] (Moscow), no. 3, March 1928, pp. 73–74 [bibl. R84]. In 1931 a second general declaration, entitled *Borba za proletarskie pozitsii na fronte prostranstvennykh*



Cover of the book *Izofront* [Visual Arts Front] (Moscow-Leningrad, 1931). Designed by Gustav Klutsis. This was one of the last constructivist book designs to be published in the Soviet Union.

iskusstv [The Struggle for Proletarian Class Positions on the Spatial Arts Front], was published as a separate pamphlet in Moscow. Apart from this, there were three other specific declarations: one by the National Sector of October (dated 1929), which rejected the idealization of pre-Revolutionary art forms and cultures, thereby opposing AKhR's support of nineteenth-century realist traditions; the Program of the Photo Section of October (dated 1930), which rejected the "abstract" photography of such artists as László Moholy-Nagy and saw the value of photography to lie in its "actuality," stipulating, moreover, that all members should be linked with industrial production or with collective farms; and an Open Letter (dated 1930) from the young artists' section of October—*Molodoi Oktyabr* [Young October]—to the central presidium of OMAKhR (see p. 265) criticizing the latter's passive, documentary interpretation of proletarian reality. [These three declarations, together with the first, were published in bibl. R500, pp. 135–60, and are reprinted in bibl. R16, pp. 608–16, 619–23; the first declaration and that of the National Sector are reprinted in bibl. R22, pp. 117–18, 121–22].

At the present time all art forms must define their positions at the front of the Socialist cultural revolution.

We are profoundly convinced that the spatial arts (architecture, painting, sculpture, graphics, the industrial arts, photography, cinematography, etc.) can escape their current crisis only when they are subordinated to the task of

КРАСНАЯ НИВА-12



ЦЕНА Ж. «КРАСНОЙ НИВЫ» ПОДСКОИ 20...
 КОПИИ ОРИГ. ДИО. ДИО. «КРАСНОЙ НИВЫ» ХУДОЖНИК ДИО. РИВЕРА.
 THE COMMUNE. DIEGO RIVERA

Cover of the journal *Krasnaya niva* [Red Field] (Moscow), no. 12, 1928. Designed by Diego Rivera. Rivera was in Moscow in 1927 and 1928 and was a member of the October group. Photograph courtesy Mr. Alfred H. Barr, Jr., New York.

serving the concrete needs of the proletariat, the leaders of the peasantry, and the backward national groups.

In participating consciously in the proletariat's ideological class struggle against hostile forces and in supporting the rapprochement of the peasantry and the nationalities with the proletariat, the spatial arts must serve the proletariat and the working masses in two interconnected fields:

in the field of ideological propaganda (by means of pictures, frescoes, printing, sculpture, photography, cinematography, etc.);

in the field of production and direct organization of the collective way of life (by means of architecture, the industrial arts, the designing of mass festivals, etc.).

The main task of this artistic service to the proletarian needs of the Revolution is to *raise the ideological, cultural, and domestic level* of the backward strata of the working class and of those workers who are undergoing an alien class influence; their level would be raised to that of the avant-garde, revolutionary industrial proletariat, which is consciously building the Socialist economy and culture on the bases of organization, planning, and highly developed industrial technology.

These principles have already been stipulated as the basis of the whole socioeconomic structure of our government, and only art has remained behind in this respect, because of the narrow, professional artisan traditions it has preserved. The most pressing task today is to eliminate this disproportion between the development of art and the socioeconomic development of our country.

For those artists who are fully aware of these principles, the following immediate tasks await:

1. The artist who belongs to the epoch of the proletarian dictatorship regards himself not as an isolated figure passively reflecting reality, but as an active fighter at the ideological front of the Proletarian Revolution; this is the front that, by its actions, is organizing mass psychology and is helping to design the new way of life. This orientation compels the proletarian artist to take stock of himself continually in order to stand with the revolutionary proletarian avant-garde at the same high ideological level.

2. He must submit to critical examination all formal and technical artistic achievements of the past. Of especial value to proletarian art are the achievements of the last decades, when the *methods of the rational and constructive* approaches to artistic creation, which had been lost by the artists of the petty bourgeoisie, were restored and developed considerably. It was at this time that artists began to penetrate the creation of dialectical and materialist methodology, of which artists had not been aware previously, and of the methods of mechanical and laboratory scientific technology; this has provided a great deal that can and must serve as material for the development of proletarian art. However, the fundamental task of the proletarian artist is not to make an eclectic collection of old devices for their own sake, but with their aid, and on new technological ground, to create new types and a new style of the spatial arts.

3. The ultimate orientation of the artist who would express the cultural interests of the revolutionary proletariat should be to propagate the world

view of dialectical materialism by the maximum means of expression within the spatial arts, and to design materially the mass, collective forms of the new life. In the light of this, we reject the philistine realism of epigones; the realism of a stagnant, individualistic way of life; passively contemplative, static, naturalistic realism with its fruitless copying of reality, embellishing and canonizing the old way of life, sapping the energy and enervating the will of the culturally underdeveloped proletariat.

We recognize and will build proletarian realism that expresses the will of the active revolutionary class; a dynamic realism that reveals life in movement and in action and that discloses systematically the potentials of life; a realism that makes things, that rebuilds rationally the old way of life and that, in the very thick of the mass struggle and construction, exerts its influence through all its artistic means. But we simultaneously reject aesthetic, abstract industrialism and unadulterated technicism that passes itself off as revolutionary art. For art to affect life creatively, we emphasize that all means of expression and design must be utilized in order to organize the consciousness, will, and emotions of the proletariat and of the working masses with maximum force. To this end, the organic cooperation of all spatial art forms must be established.

4. Proletarian art must overcome individualistic and commercial relationships, which have dominated art up until now. While we reject the bureaucratic concepts of the "social commission," which has gained ground over recent years, we do seek social commissions from consumer collectives; these order works of art for concrete objectives and participate collectively in the preparation of artistic objects. In this respect the industrial arts are assuming more importance, since they are proving to be durable and effective in collective production and consumption.

5. In order to obtain maximum results we are attempting to concentrate our efforts on the following vital points:

- a) rational construction, problems of new residential accommodation, social buildings, etc.
- b) artistic design of objects for mass consumption manufactured by industry
- c) artistic design of centers for the new collective way of life: workers' clubs, reading rooms, canteens, tearooms, etc.
- d) organization of mass festivals
- e) art education

We are firmly convinced that the paths we have indicated will lead to the intensive development of creative strength among the masses. We support this development of mass creative aspiration, since we know that the basic

process of the development of the spatial arts in the U.S.S.R. is advancing because of the proximity of the independent art of proletarian art circles, workers' clubs, and peasants to highly qualified professional art, and is maintaining the level of artistic technology identifiable with the industrial epoch.

In advancing along these paths, proletarian art leaves behind the slogan of the transitional period—"Art to the Masses"—and prepares the ground for the art of the masses.

In acknowledging organization, rationality, and collectivism as the basic principles of the new artistic and cultural construction in the country of the proletarian dictatorship, the October Association establishes a definite working discipline for bringing together its members on the basis of the above principles. These principles will need a more thorough elaboration in the association's subsequent creative, ideological, and social activity.

In issuing the present declaration, we disassociate ourselves from all existing art groups active in the field of the spatial arts. We are prepared to join forces with some of them as long as they acknowledge the basic principles of our platform in practical terms. We greet the idea of a federation of art societies¹ and will support any serious organizational steps in this direction.

We are embarking at a time of transition for the development of the spatial arts in the U.S.S.R. With regard to the basic forces active in modern Soviet art, the natural process of artistic and ideological self-determination is being hampered by a number of unhealthy phenomena. We consider it our duty to declare that we reject the system of personal and group patronage and protection for individual artistic trends and individual artists. We support wholly the unrestricted, healthy competition of artistic directions and schools within the areas of technical competence, higher quality of artistic and ideological production and stylistic researches. But we reject unhealthy competition between artistic groups for commissions and patronage of influential individuals and institutions. We reject any claim by any one association of artists to ideological monopoly or exclusive representation of the artistic interests of the working and peasant masses. We reject the system that can allow an artificially created and privileged position (moral and material) for any one artistic group at the expense of other associations or groups; this is a radical contradiction of the Party's and the government's artistic policy. We reject speculation on "social commissions," which occurs beneath the mask of revolutionary theme and everyday realism, and which replaces any serious effort to formulate a revolutionary world view and world perception with a simplified interpretation of a hurriedly invented revolutionary subject.

We are against the dictatorship of philistine elements in the Soviet spatial arts and for the cultural maturity, artistic craftsmanship, and ideological consistence of the new proletarian artists, who are quickly gaining strength and advancing to the fore.

The ranks of the proletariat, progressive, active, and artistically concerned, are growing before our very eyes. Mass art summons the vast masses to artistic involvement. This involvement is linked to the class struggle, to the development of industry, and to the transformation of life. This work demands sincerity, high qualifications, cultural maturity, revolutionary awareness. We will dedicate all our strength to this work.

OST [Society of Easel Artists] Platform, 1929

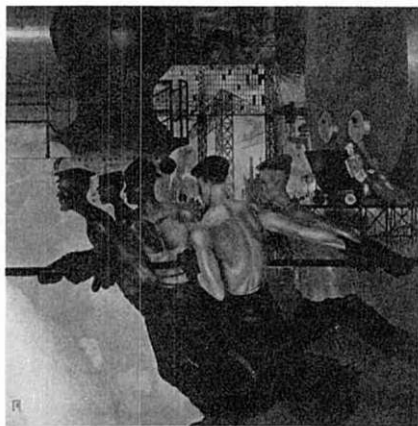
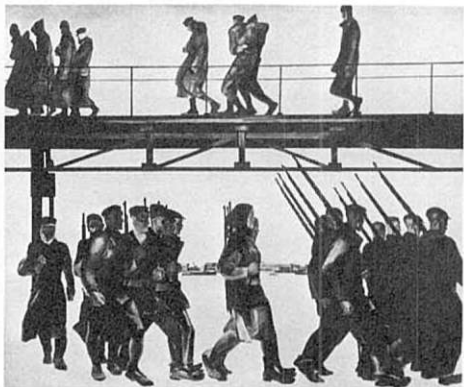
OST [Obshchestvo khudozhnikov-stankovistov—Society of Easel Artists] arose as an untitled group just after the “First Discussional” (see pp. 237ff.), in late 1924, and was established formally in 1925. Founding members included Yurii Annenkov, Aleksandr Deineka, Yurii Pimenov, David Shterenberg (chairman), and Petr Vilyams, and its membership soon came to encompass many leading figures of young Soviet art. OST had four exhibitions from 1925 to 1928, all in Moscow (Deineka contributed only to the first two, leaving the society early in 1927). Although OST supported easel painting as opposed to industrial design (one reason that Deineka left), it did not reject the achievements of the old avant-garde; Ivan Klyun, for instance, was invited to contribute to the first OST exhibition.

The text of this piece, “Platforma OSTa” (part of the society’s code), was formulated in 1929 but not published until 1933 in *Sovetskoe iskusstvo za 15 let* [Soviet Art of the Last Fifteen Years], ed. Ivan Matsa et al. (Moscow-Leningrad), p. 575 [bibl. R16], from which this translation is made. It was based probably on Shterenberg’s lecture at the Communist Academy in Moscow in May 1928, entitled “Teoreticheskaya platforma i khudozhestvennaya praktika OSTa” [The Theoretical Platform and Artistic Practice of OST]. OST contributed a great deal to the renewal of easel activity and achieved very interesting results, particularly in the initial work of Pimenov, Aleksandr Tyshler, and Vilyams. In some cases, as in Pimenov’s war pictures, the influence of German expressionists such as Otto Dix and George Grosz

Cover of the exhibition catalogue of OST [Society of Easel Artists] (Moscow, 1927). Artist unknown.



Aleksandr Deineka: *Defense of Petrograd*, 1915. Oil on canvas, 218 x 359 cm. Collection Central Museum of the Soviet Army, Moscow. Although regarded as an important precursor of Socialist Realist painting, this picture derives its subject and composition directly from Ferdinand Hodler's *The Departure of the Volunteers in 1813*, 1908, Friedrich Schiller University, Jena.



Yurii Pimenov: *Give to Heavy Industry*, 1927. Oil on canvas, 260 x 212 cm. Collection Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow. The very graphic, linear quality of this work was typical of Pimenov's industrial and athletic scenes of the mid-1920s, and revealed his interest in later German expressionism, especially as interpreted by Otto Dix.



Aleksandr Tyshler: *Woman and an Airplane*, 1926. Oil on canvas, 89 x 71 cm. Private collection, Moscow. Tyshler's work, especially of the mid- and late 1920s, possessed a distinctly surrealist quality—one shared by other members of OST, such as Rostislav Barto and Sergei Luchishkin.

was especially noticeable, although this angular, skeletal quality was also very effective in the young Soviet artists' depictions of industrial and mechanical scenes. OST members displayed a technical competence and an intellectual energy lacking in the "sketchy" studies of Four Arts or the academic work of AKhRR.

On the basis of the following program, the Society of Easel Artists aims to unite artists who are doing practical work in the field of the visual arts:

1. In the epoch of Socialist construction the active forces of art must be participants in this construction; in addition, they must be one of the factors in the cultural revolution affecting the reconstruction and design of our new way of life and the creation of the new Socialist culture.

2. Bearing in mind that only art of high quality can envisage such tasks, we consider it essential, within the conditions of the contemporary development of art, to advocate the basic lines along which our work in the visual arts must advance. These lines are:

- a) The rejection of abstraction and *peredvizhnichestvo*¹ in subject matter
- b) The rejection of sketchiness as a phenomenon of latent dilettantism
- c) The rejection of pseudo Cézannism as a disintegrating force in the discipline of form, drawing, and color
- d) Revolutionary contemporaneity and clarity of subject matter
- e) Aspiration to absolute technical mastery in the field of thematic easel painting, drawing, and sculpture as the formal attainments of the last few years are developed further
- f) Aspiration to make the picture a finished article
- g) Orientation toward young artists

Four Arts Society of Artists Declaration, 1929

The Four Arts Society was founded in Moscow in 1925 by, among others, Lev Bruni, Vladimir Favorsky, Pavel Kuznetsov, Vladimir Lebedev, Petr Miturich, Kuzma Petrov-Vodkin, and as these names would indicate, the society was espe-

cially interested in the decorative and lyrical aspects of art. Four Arts, however, was eclectic and, apart from the above artists, represented at its four exhibitions (1925, 1926, 1929, in Moscow; 1928, in Leningrad) such diverse artists as Ivan Klyun (1926), El Lissitzky (1926), and unexpectedly, Ivan Puni (1928), and it even numbered architects among its members. A history of Soviet architecture published in 1970 [bibl. R22, p. 115] refers to five state exhibitions and one foreign one, but a 1965 Soviet publication on exhibitions of the visual arts [bibl. R152] does not support this. According to Ivan Matsa's 1933 volume [bibl. R16, p. 338] and Troels Andersen's catalogue of the Malevich collection in Amsterdam [bibl. 160, p. 163], Kazimir Malevich was also represented at one of the Four Arts exhibitions, but the 1965 Soviet book [bibl. R152] does not corroborate this. Already in a state of decline in 1930, Four Arts underwent further disruption when some of its members left to join AKhRR [see bibl. R16, pp. 581-82]; it was, in any case, dissolved by the decree "On the Reconstruction" (see pp. 288ff.).

The text of this piece, "Obshchestvo 4 iskusstva. Deklaratsiya," is from *Ezhгодnik literaturny i iskusstva* [Annual of Literature and Art] (Moscow), October 1929, pp. 551-52 [bibl. R15; it is reprinted in bibl. R16, pp. 321-22]. Despite its late date, the declaration indicates that Soviet artists could still enjoy a certain independence from the Party machine. However, the more individualistic conception of art and the general concern with formal rather than with thematic value favored by members of Four Arts gave the society a distinctive and unconventional stance soon criticized both by the political administration and by fellow groups such as OST and AKhR. In general, the Four Arts members favored an art form more delicate and refined than that of OST or AKhR members, and graphics and water colors were their most frequent media. This ethereal quality in the washes of Bruni and Kuznetsov, Petr Lvov, and Nikolai Tyrza, to mention but a few, prompted comparisons with the French impressionists and symbolists, and it is relevant to note that some of the older members—Nikolai Feofilaktov, Kuznetsov, Martiros Saryan—had been members of the symbolist Blue Rose group in 1907. The code of the society has recently been published in bibl. R514, pp. 169-75.

What the artist shows the spectator above all is the artistic quality of his work.

Only in this quality does the artist express his attitude to the surrounding world.

The development of art and of artistic culture has reached the stage when the most profound characteristic of its specific element is to be found in its simplicity and closeness to human feeling.

Within the conventions of the Russian tradition, we consider painterly realism to be most appropriate to the artistic culture of our time. We consider



Vladimir Favorsky: *Lenin 1917-1927, 1927*. Woodcut, 17.5 x 12.5 cm.

the French school, a school that is most fully and most universally developing the basic qualities of the painterly art, to be of the greatest value to ourselves.

On the Artist's Tasks

The content of our work is not characterized by subject matter, and therefore, on no account do we give titles to our pictures. The choice of subject characterizes the artistic tasks with which the artist is concerned. In this sense the subject is merely a pretext for the creative transformation of material into artistic form. The spectator perceives confirmation of artistic truth

in the transference undergone by visible forms, when the artist takes their painterly meaning from life and constructs a new form—the picture. This new form is important not because of its similarity to the living form, but because of its harmony with the material out of which it is constructed. This material—the picture's surface and its color—consists of paint, canvas, etc. The effect of an artistic form on the spectator derives from the nature of a given medium, from its qualities and basic elements (music has its own, painting its own, literature its own). The organization of these qualities and the mastery of material for the attainment of this goal comprise artistic creation.

PAVEL FILONOV

Ideology of Analytical Art

[*Extract*], 1930

Born Moscow, 1883; died Leningrad, 1941. 1897: moved to St. Petersburg; 1901–1903: engaged in house painting, decorating, and restoration work; 1903–1908: at the private studio of the academician Lev Dmitriev-Kavkazsky; 1908–10: attended the St. Petersburg Academy; 1910 and thereafter: close to the Union of Youth, contributing to three of its exhibitions; 1912: traveled to Italy and France; 1913: with Iosif Shkolnik designed decor for Vladimir Mayakovsky's tragedy *Vladimir Mayakovsky*; 1914–15: illustrated futurist booklets and published a long, neologistic poem with his own illustrations [bibl. R347]; propounded the first ideas of his theory of analytical art and his system called "Mirovoi rastsvet" [Universal Flowering]; 1916–18: military service; 1923: professor at the Petrograd Academy and associate of the Petrograd Institute of Artistic Culture (IKhK); 1925: established the Collective of Masters of Analytical Art (the Filonov School); 1929–30: one-man exhibition planned at the Russian Museum, Leningrad; 1930s: continued to paint according to his theories.

The text of this piece, "Ideologiya analiticheskogo iskusstva," is from *P. Filonov. Katalog proizvedenii nakhodyashchikhsya v Russkom muzee* [P. Filonov. Catalogue of Works in the Russian Museum] (Leningrad, 1930), pp. 41–52 [bibl. R507]. The catalogue was printed in 1929 and issued in 1930, and although the preparations for



Pavel Filonov: *Self-Portrait*, 1909-10. India ink, 6.8 x 10.5 cm. Collection Russian Museum, Leningrad.

the exhibition reached their final stage, it was not opened ultimately for political reasons and because of pressure from the AKhR artists. The catalogue contained a preface by the critic Sergei Isakov (pp. 3-28), who criticized Filonov for his visual distortion of workers and for his individualism. Filonov wrote the first draft of his theory of analytical art in 1914-15, a second in 1923 (published as "The Declaration of Universal Flowering" [bibl. R508]), and thereafter several versions, but as such it did not appear under the specific title "Ideology of Analytical Art" until the publication of this catalogue (which, in any case, carried only the short extract translated here). The tension between the concepts of the intellect and the psyche, analysis and intuition, central to Filonov's theory was nowhere more evident than in his frequent recourse to scientific terminology, paralleled in pictorial terms by his application of concrete titles to highly subjective and abstract themes. Both the biological and intuitionist concepts favored by Filonov betrayed the influence of Nikolai Kulbin on the one hand, and of Vladimir Markov and perhaps even of Olga Rozanova on the other—all of whom Filonov had known in St. Petersburg. Filonov's theory had a certain following during the mid- and late 1920s, through his students, such as Yuliya Arapova and Alisa Poret, and the Filonov School continued to exist during the early 1930s, contributing, inter al., to the remarkable edition of the Finnish Kalevala in 1933 [bibl. R512]. Filonov's proposed exhibition, his unflinching belief in his own system, and the activity of his students constituted a last open stand against the official and exclusive imposition of realism and socialist realism after about 1930. It was a tragic paradox that Filonov, so deeply concerned with the formulation of a pro-

letarian art, should have been censured during his last decade as a "monstrous hybrid of metaphysics and vulgar materialism . . . manifesting complete confusion in the face of reality" [bibl. R491, p. 60].

A work of art is any piece of work made with the maximum tension of analytical madeness.¹

The only professional criterion for evaluating a piece of work is its madeness.

In their profession the artist and his disciple must love all that is "made well" and hate all that is "not made."

In analytical thought the process of study becomes an integral part of the creative process for the piece being made.

The more consciously and forcefully the artist works on his intellect, the stronger the effect the finished work has on the spectator.

Each brushstroke, each contact with the picture, is a precise recording through the material and in the material of the inner psychical process taking place in the artist, and the whole work is the entire recording of the intellect of the person who made it.

Art is the reflection through material or the record in material of the struggle for the formation of man's higher intellectual condition and of the struggle for existence by this higher psychological condition. Art's efficacy vis-à-vis the spectator is equal to this; i.e., it both makes him superior and summons him to become superior.

The artist-proletarian's obligation is not only to create works that answer the demands of today, but also to open the way to intellect into the distant future.

The artist-proletarian must act on the intellect of his comrade proletarians not only through what they can understand at their present stage of development.

Work on content is work on form and vice versa.

The more forcefully form is expressed, the more forcefully content is expressed.

Form is made by persistent line. Every line must be made.

Every atom must be made; the whole work must be made and adapted.

Think persistently and accurately over every atom of the work you are doing. Make every atom persistently and accurately.

Introduce persistently and accurately into every atom the color you have



Pavel Filonov: *Untitled*, 1924-25. India ink, 30.5 x 27 cm. Collection Russian Museum, Leningrad. Executed according to his theory of analytical art, this work introduced "all the predicates of the object and its sphere: objective reality, pulsation and its sphere, biodynamics, intellect, emanations, interfusions, geneses, processes of color and form—in a word, life as a whole" [bibl. R508, p. 13].

studied—so that it enters the atom just as heat enters the body or so that it is linked organically with the form, just as in nature a flower's cellulose is linked with its color.

Painting is the colored conclusion of drawing.

Central Committee of the
All-Union Communist Party
(Bolsheviks)
Decree on the Reconstruction
of Literary and
Artistic Organizations, 1932

This decree, passed April 23, 1932, marked the culmination of a series of measures that had been curtailing the artist's independence (e.g., the decrees "On the Party's Policy in the Field of Artistic Literature," 1925, and "On the Production of Poster Pictures," 1931). Before the 1932 decree there had been attempts to consolidate artistic forces by establishing umbrella societies, such as Vsekhudozhnik [Vserossiiskii kooperativ khudozhnikov—All-Russian Cooperative of Artists] in 1929, FOSKh in 1930 [see n. 1 to the October "Declaration," p. 308], and RAPKh in 1931 [see *ibid.*], but such organizations had retained a certain independence of the political machine. The direct result of the 1932 decree was to dissolve all official art groups immediately; and although the proposed single Union of Soviet Artists (i.e., Soyuz khudozhnikov SSSR [Union of Artists of the U.S.S.R.]) was not created until 1957, a special committee was organized in 1936 to take charge of all art affairs except those involving architecture and the cinema—Komitet po delam iskusstv pri Sovete ministrov SSSR [Committee for Art Affairs Attached to the Council of U.S.S.R. Ministers]; in turn, the decree prepared the ground for the conclusive advocacy of socialist realism at the First All-Union Congress of Soviet Writers in 1934 (see pp. 290ff.). For reactions to the decree see bibl. R16, pp. 645–51.

The text of this piece, *O Perestroike literaturno-khudozhestvennykh organizatsii*, appeared as a separate pamphlet in 1932; it is reprinted in *Sovetskoe iskusstvo za 15 let* [Soviet Art of the Last Fifteen Years], ed. Ivan Matsa et al. (Moscow-Leningrad, 1933), pp. 644–45 [bibl. R16], from which this translation is made; it has been reprinted several times since Matsa, e.g., in bibl. R493.

The Central Committee states that over recent years literature and art have made considerable advances, both quantitative and qualitative, on the basis of the significant progress of Socialist construction.

A few years ago the influence of alien elements, especially those revived by the first years of NEP,¹ was still apparent and marked. At this time, when the cadres of proletarian literature were still weak, the Party helped in



Aleksandr Gerasimov: *Stalin and Voroshilov in the Kremlin Grounds*, 1938. Oil on canvas, 300 x 390 cm. Collection Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow. Gerasimov was Stalin's favorite Soviet artist.

every possible way to create and consolidate special proletarian organs in the field of literature and art in order to maintain the position of proletarian writers and art workers.

At the present time the cadres of proletarian literature and art have managed to expand, new writers and artists have come forward from the factories, plants, and collective farms, but the confines of the existing proletarian literature and art organizations (VOAPP, RAPP, RAPM,² etc.) are becoming too narrow and are hampering the serious development of artistic creation. This factor creates a danger: these organizations might change from being an instrument for the maximum mobilization of Soviet writers and artists for the tasks of Socialist construction to being an instrument for cultivating elitist withdrawal and loss of contact with the political tasks of contemporaneity and with the important groups of writers and artists who sympathize with Socialist construction.

Hence the need for the appropriate reconstruction of literary and artistic organizations and the extension of the basis of their activity.

Following from this, the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) decrees:

1. Liquidation of the Association of Proletarian Writers (VOAPP, RAPP).

2. Integration of all writers who support the platform of the Soviet government and who aspire to participate in Socialist construction in a single union of Soviet writers with a Communist faction therein.
3. Execution of analogous changes with regard to the other arts.
4. Charging of the Organizational Bureau with working out practical measures for the fulfillment of this resolution.

CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE FIRST ALL-UNION CONGRESS OF SOVIET WRITERS [EXTRACTS], 1934

The Union of Soviet Writers, founded in 1932, held its first congress in Moscow August 17 to September 2, 1934. The minutes were published as *Pervyi Vsesoyuznyi s'ezd sovetskikh pisatelei 1934. Stenograficheskiy otchet* [First All-Union Congress of Soviet Writers 1934. Stenographic Report] (Moscow, November 1934) [bibl. R498; English version bibl. 272]. This congress, under the chairmanship of Maxim Gorky, played a major role in the history of Soviet culture not only because it constituted an impressive symbol of solidarity (almost six hundred delegates from almost fifty Soviet nationalities were present), but also because it advocated socialist realism as the only viable artistic medium for Soviet literature and art. Throughout the 1920s, the ideas of realism and, more specifically, heroic realism had been supported by Party officials as well as by a number of Soviet writers and artists (the latter especially in the context of AKhRR). But while the term socialist realism had become common currency by 1930, its meaning remained imprecise as Lunacharsky, for example, indicated: "Socialist realism is an extensive program; it includes many different methods—those we already possess and those we are still acquiring" [from "Sotsialisticheskii realizm"—Socialist Realism—in bibl. R403, vol. 8, 501]. The 1934 congress, particularly in the persons of Gorky and Andrei Zhdanov, attempted to explain the concept of socialist realism and to advance principles such as typicality, optimism, "revolutionary romanticism," "reality in its revolutionary development," as fundamental to the understanding the new doctrine. In literature, in fact, Gorky was regarded as the founder of socialist realism since these qualities could be identified with much of his work, particularly with his plays and with his famous novel *Mat* [Mother] (1906). Within the framework of the visual arts, there was no precursor of Gorky's stature, although the very strong realist movement of the second half of the nineteenth century provided a firm traditional basis, and later realists such as

Abram Arkhipov and Nikolai Kasatkin acted as vital links between the pre-and post-Revolutionary periods. While the emphasis of the congress was, of course, on literature, its general tenets were applicable to all the Soviet arts, especially to the visual arts. Igor Grabar, once a peripheral member of the World of Art but never a radical artist, made this quite clear in his speech: not only did he accept the Party's jurisdiction in matters of art, but also his description of the "distant past" as "dismal" echoed Gorky's condemnation of the period 1907-17 as the "most disgraceful and shameful decade in the history of the Russian intelligentsia" [bibl. R498, p. 12]. Grabar, already an Honored Art Worker and famous for his several pictures of Lenin, was the only professional artist who spoke at the congress. However, some of the literary speakers had been in contact with the more progressive forces of Russian and Soviet art. Viktor Shklovsky and Sergei Tretyakov, for example, once associated with *Lef* and with the constructivists, made substantial contributions to the congress, although Shklovsky was quick to criticize his former artistic sympathies: "we, former members of *Lef*, took what was useful from life, thinking that this was aesthetic; we constructivists created a construction that proved to be nonconstructive . . ." [ibid., p. 155]. Such artists as Filonov, Malevich, and Tatlin were not, of course, present at the congress. What became patently clear there was the degree to which artistic policy in the Soviet Union relied on the political machine, a fact expressed explicitly and implicitly in one of the opening speeches, by Andrei Zhdanov, then secretary of the Communist Party of the U.S.S.R. Although Stalin himself did not speak at the congress, the numerous references to his leadership strewn throughout the speeches, and the formal addresses to Stalin and Marshal Voroshilov that concluded the congress, indicated the power that the governmental hierarchy already exerted in the field of art and literature. The effect of the congress on the evolution of Soviet art was decisive. The ratification of socialist realism as the only artistic style acceptable to a Socialist society and, hence, as an international style, together with the several subsequent decrees that attempted to abolish "formalism" in the arts, led directly to its exclusive application in the U.S.S.R.; and although this led, in turn, to a standardization of form and content, there is no doubt that the portraits of official celebrities, the industrial and collective farm landscapes, the scenes of the Red Army and Navy were immediately intelligible and achieved a lasting popularity among the masses. A parallel is drawn sometimes between Soviet socialist realism and American social realism of the 1930s and 1940s. While there are similarities in method, it should be remembered that the city scenes of Philip Evergood or Louis Lozowick, for example, were much more "actual" than their Soviet counterparts, i.e., they were concerned with a given scene at a given time and not with the potential of reality, with what Zhdanov called "revolutionary romanticism." It was precisely this quality that lent a certain vigor and imaginativeness to the Soviet work of the 1930s, evident, for example, in the scenes of factories under construction, of harvesting, of shipyards, i.e., optimistic scenes that contained a "glimpse of tomorrow" (Zhdanov). Unfortunately, the postwar period has witnessed an adulteration of the original socialist realist principles—revolutionary romanticism

has been replaced often by sentimentalism, optimism by overt fantasy—and few modern works in this idiom still maintain the intensity and single-mindedness of the initial socialist realist work.

There were twenty-six separate sessions at the congress, dedicated to various areas of interest, and there were almost three hundred spoken contributions. Among the Soviet speakers, many famous names figured, such as Isaak Babel, Demyan Bednyi, Kornei Chukovsky, Ilya Ehrenburg, Konstantin Fedin, Fedor Gladkov, Vera Inber, Boris Pasternak, Marietta Shaginyan, and Aleksandr Tairov. In addition, there were also forty-one non-Soviet participants, including Louis Aragon, Robert Gessner, André Malraux, Klaus Mann, Karl Radek, Ernst Toller, and Amabel Williams-Ellis.

The full texts of the above pieces were published in the collection of reports, speeches, and resolutions entitled *Pervyi Vsesoyuznyi sezd sovetskikh pisatelei 1934. Stenograficheskii otchet* [First All-Union Congress of Soviet Writers 1934. Stenographic Report], ed. Ivan Luppel et al. (Moscow, November 1934) [bibl. R498], and the translations are from pp. 2–5, 13–14, 545–46, and 716 respectively. A version of the proceedings appeared in an English translation as *Problems of Soviet Literature* (New York, 1935) [bibl. 272]; although much abridged it contains the full texts of the Zhdanov and Gorky speeches as well as of Karl Radek's "Contemporary World Literature and the Tasks of Proletarian Art" and Nikolai Bukharin's "Poetry, Poetics and the Problems of Poetry in the USSR." For details on the general artistic climate of the 1930s, including commentary on the congress, see bibl. 256, 265, R494, R497, R503.

From Andrei Zhdanov's Speech

Comrades, in the name of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party of Bolsheviks and the Soviet of People's Commissars of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, allow me to present our warmest greetings to the first congress of Soviet writers and thereby to all the writers of our Soviet Union—headed by the great proletarian writer Aleksei Maksimovich Gorky [*Loud applause*].

Comrades, your congress is meeting at a time when the basic difficulties confronting us on the path of Socialist construction have already been overcome, when our country has laid the foundation of a Socialist economy—

something that is bound closely to the victorious policy of industrialization and the construction of state and collective farms.

Your congress is meeting at a time when the Socialist way of life has gained final and complete victory in our country—under the leadership of the Communist Party and under our leader of genius, Comrade Stalin [*Loud applause*]. Consequently, advancing from milestone to milestone, from victory to victory, from the time of the Civil War to the reconstruction period, and from the reconstruction period to the Socialist reconstruction of the entire national economy, our Party has led the country to victory over capitalist elements, ousting them from all spheres of the national economy. . . .

In our hands we hold a sure weapon, thanks to which we can overcome all the difficulties besetting our path. This weapon is the great and invincible doctrine of Marx-Engels-Lenin-Stalin, a doctrine that has been put into practice by our Party and by our soviets.

The great banner of Marx-Engels-Lenin-Stalin is victorious. It is thanks precisely to this victorious banner that the first congress of Soviet writers has met together here. If there had been no such victory, then there would have been no congress. Only we Bolsheviks, no one else, could have convoked such a congress as this. . . .

Comrade Stalin has called our writers “engineers of human souls.”¹ What does this mean? What obligations does this title impose on us?

First of all, it means that we must know life so as to depict it truthfully in our works of art—and not to depict it scholastically, lifelessly, or merely as “objective reality”; we must depict reality in its revolutionary development.

In this respect, truth and historical concreteness of the artistic depiction must be combined with the task of the ideological transformation and education of the working people in the spirit of Socialism. This method of artistic literature and literary criticism is what we call socialist realism. . . .

To be an engineer of human souls means to stand with both feet on the ground of real life. And this, in turn, denotes a break with the old-style romanticism that depicted a nonexistent life with nonexistent heroes and that spirited the reader away from the contradictions and oppression of life to an unreal world, to a world of utopias. Romanticism cannot be alien to our literature, which stands with both feet on the firm basis of materialism; but it must be a romanticism of a new kind, a revolutionary romanticism. We say that socialist realism is the basic method of Soviet artistic literature and literary criticism, and this presupposes that revolutionary romanticism must enter literary creativity as an integral part, because the whole life of our Party, of our working class and its struggle consists of a combination of the most severe, most sober practical work with supreme heroism and grand

prospects. Our Party has always derived its strength from the fact that it united—and continues to unite—particular activity and practicality with grand prospects, with a ceaseless aspiration onward, with the struggle for the construction of a Communist society. *Soviet literature must be able to show our heroes, must be able to catch a glimpse of our tomorrow. This will not be a utopia, because our tomorrow is being prepared today by our systematic and conscious work. . . .*

Create works with a high level of craftsmanship, with high ideological and artistic content!

Be as active as you can in organizing the transformation of the human consciousness in the spirit of Socialism!

Be in the vanguard of the fighters for a classless Socialist society! [Loud applause].

From Maxim Gorky's Speech on Soviet Literature

. . . All of us—writers, factory workers, collective-farm workers—still work badly and do not even grasp *in toto* everything created by us, for us. Our working masses still do not fully comprehend that they are working for themselves and in their own interests. This realization is slowly awakening everywhere, but it has still not burst into a powerful and joyful incandescence. But nothing can burst into flame until it has reached a certain temperature, and nothing has ever raised the temperature of working energy so splendidly as the Party—organized by the genius of Vladimir Lenin—and the present leader of this Party.

We must choose labor as the central hero of our books, i.e., man organized by the processes of labor, who in our country is armed with all the might of modern technology, man who, in turn, is making labor easier, more productive, raising it to the level of art. We must learn to understand labor as creativity. Creativity is a term that we writers use too often—while scarcely having the right to do so. Creativity comes about at that degree of intense mental work when the mind, in its rapidity of work, extracts the more salient and characteristic facts, images, and details from the reserves

of knowledge and transposes them into very precise, vivid, and intelligible words. Our young literature cannot boast of this quality. Our writers' reserves of impressions, their depths of knowledge are not great, and one does not feel that they care much about expanding and deepening their reserves. . . .

From Igor Grabar's Speech

Comrades, we, visual arts workers, have come here to give the congress our warmest proletarian greetings in the name of the entire army of the visual arts front.

Comrades, there are no realms more closely linked than those of Soviet literature and Soviet art. Comrade writers, you depict life as you see it, understand it, and feel it, and we depict it in the same way. You use the method of socialist realism, and we too use this well-tested method—the best of all existing ones.

I don't have to remind you that we are not merely the illustrators of your books; we are also your comrades in arms. We together have fought, are fighting, and will fight our common class enemy [*Applause*]. We both have the same class aspiration. We both have a common past, a common present, and a common future.

It is not worth dwelling on the distant past. It is dismal enough. In those days there did not exist the Socialist direction that emerged only with the Revolution and that alone rouses us to perform real, heroic deeds.

But even in the recent past, in the first years of the Revolution, not everything went smoothly from the start. Our ranks were thin. Slowly but surely they began to expand as decisive progress was made on the front of Socialist construction, and with this gradual expansion these ranks came to assume an impressive force.

Comrade writers, we share with you one very important date—April 23, 1932—the day when the fact of our inclusion in the great edifice erected by the Party was recognized, an inclusion unconditional and unreserved. In this the Party displayed its trust in us and rendered us a great honor.

Comrades, hitherto we have not fully justified this trust and honor, but we

have come here to take a solemn oath that we will justify this trust and honor in the very near future.

Comrades, we have paid great heed to everything that has gone on within these walls over the past weeks. We have listened to so many of you state that this congress has taught you much. Comrades, this congress has taught us a great deal too. We hope to make good use of your experience and of the ideas that you have expressed here at our own congress, which will take place in the near future—a congress of visual arts workers [*Applause*].²

For the moment, allow me to state that your congress has already redoubled our belief in the proximity of the final victory of Socialism, that this congress has trebled our conviction and our will to give over our pencil and our chisel to the great creator of Socialism and a classless society—to the mighty Party of Lenin and to its leader, Comrade Stalin [*Applause*].

Comrades, as a sign of our strength of will, allow me to present this congress with a portrait of our leader—done by one of the representatives of our younger generation, Comrade Malkov [*Long applause*].³

*From the First Section of the
Charter of the Union of
Soviet Writers of the U.S.S.R.*

The great victories of the working class in the struggle for Socialism have assured literature, art, science, and cultural growth as a whole of exceptional prospects for their development.

The fact that non-Party writers have turned toward the Soviet regime and that proletarian artistic literature has achieved gigantic growth has, with urgent insistence, demonstrated the need to unite writers' forces—both Party and non-Party—in a single writers' organization.

The historic resolution of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) on April 23, 1932, indicated that the organizational form of this unification would be the creation of a single Union of Soviet Writers. At the same time, it pointed to the ideological and creative paths along which Soviet artistic literature would advance.

A decisive condition for literary growth, for its artistic craftsmanship, its ideological and political saturation, is the close and direct link of the literary movement with the topical issues of the Party's policies and the Soviet regime, the inclusion of writers in active Socialist construction, and their careful and profound study of concrete reality.

During the years of proletarian dictatorship, Soviet artistic literature and Soviet literary criticism, hand in hand with the working class and guided by the Communist Party, have worked out their own new creative principles. These creative principles have been formulated on the one hand as a result of critical assimilation of the literary heritage of the past and, on the other, on the basis of a study of the experience gained from the triumphant construction of Socialism and the development of Socialist culture. These creative bases have found their chief expression in the principles of *socialist realism*.

Socialist realism, as the basic method of Soviet artistic literature and literary criticism, requires of the artist a true, historically concrete depiction of reality in its Revolutionary development. In this respect, truth and historical concreteness of the artistic depiction of reality must be combined with the task of the ideological transformation and education of the workers in the spirit of Socialism.

Socialist realism assures artistic creation of exceptional prospects for manifesting creative initiative, of a choice of diverse forms, styles, and genres. The victory of Socialism, the intense growth of production forces unprecedented in the history of mankind, the growing process of class liquidation, the abolition of any possibility of man exploiting man and the abolition of the opposition between town and country, and finally the unprecedented progress in the growth of science, technology, and culture—all these factors create limitless opportunities for the qualitative and quantitative growth of creative forces and the flowering of all species of art and literature. . . .

