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CURRENT EVENTS

## Alexander Mikhailovich Rodchenko

Born: December 5, 1891, Saint Petersburg, Russia

Died: December 3, 1956, Moscow, Russia



*"We had visions of a new world, industry, technology and science. We simultaneously invented and changed the world around us. We authored new notions of beauty and redefined art itself."*

### Alexander Rodchenko

#### ALEXANDER RODCHENKO SYNOPSIS

Alexander Rodchenko is perhaps the most important avant-garde artist to have put his art in the service of political revolution. In this regard, his career is a model of the clash between modern art and radical politics. He emerged as a fairly conventional painter, but his encounters with Russian Futurists propelled him to become an influential founder of the Constructivist movement. And his commitment to the Russian Revolution subsequently encouraged him to abandon first painting and then fine art in its entirety, and to instead put his skills in the service of industry and the state, designing everything from advertisements to book covers. His life's work was a ceaseless experiment with an extraordinary array of media, from painting and sculpture to graphic design and photography. Later in his career, however, the increasingly repressive policies targeted against modern artists in Russia led him to return to painting.

#### ALEXANDER RODCHENKO KEY IDEAS

- Rodchenko's art and thought moved extremely rapidly in the 1910s. He began as an aesthete, inspired by Art Nouveau artists such as Aubrey Beardsley. He later became a Futurist. He digested the work of Vladimir Tatlin, and the Suprematism of Kazimir Malevich. By the decade's end he was pioneering Constructivism. This experimental inquiry into the elements of pictorial and sculptural art produced purely abstract artworks that separate out the components of each image - line, form, space, color, surface, texture, and the work's physical support. Constructivism encouraged a new focus on the tangible and material aspects of art, and its experimental spirit was encouraged by a belief that art had to match the revolutionary transformations then taking place in Russian politics and society.
- Rodchenko's commitment to the values of the Revolution encouraged him to abandon painting in 1921. He embraced a more functional view of art and of the artist, and he began collaborating with the poet Vladimir Mayakovsky on a series of advertising campaigns. Their work not only introduced modern design into Russian advertising, but it attempted to sell the values of the Revolution along with the products being promoted. This particular union of modern design, politics, and commerce has occasionally inspired advertisers in the West since the fall of the Berlin Wall.

#### ANALYSIS OF ALEXANDER RODCHENKO'S ART WORKS:



ADDITIONAL ARTWORK ▶

#### FEATURED BOOKS: ?

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★ ▶ **Rodchenko and Popova: Defining Constructivism**

By Margarita Tupitsyn, Christina Kiaer

▶ **Rodchenko: Photography 1924-1954**

By Alexander Lavrentiev

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▶ **Experiments for the Future: Diaries, Essays, Letters and Other Writings**

By Alexander N. Lavrentiev, John E. Bowlit, Jamey Gambrell, Aleksandr Rodchenko

#### WEB RESOURCES:

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websites

▶ **The Museum of Modern Art Collection of Alexander Rodchenko's works**

★ ▶ **The 1998 Retrospective of Alexander Rodchenko's work at the Museum of Modern Art**

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▶ **Rodchenko & Popova: Defining Constructivism, at the Tate Modern, London**

By Rose Lejeune  
California Literary Review  
March 31, 2009

★ ▶ **At Full Tilt**

By Adrian Searle  
The Guardian  
February 9, 2009

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★ ▶ **"Rodchenko and Popova: Defining Constructivism" at the Tate Modern**

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- Photography was important to Rodchenko in the 1920s in his attempt to find new media more appropriate to his goal of serving the revolution. He first viewed it as a source of preexisting imagery, using it in montages of pictures and text, but later he began to take pictures himself and evolved an aesthetic of unconventional angles, abruptly cropped compositions, and stark contrasts of light and shadow. His work in both photomontage and photography ultimately made an important contribution to European photography in the 1920s.

COMMENT TO EDITOR

## ALEXANDER RODCHENKO BIOGRAPHY

### Childhood

Alexander Rodchenko was born in Saint Petersburg, Russia, to a working class family. His father, Mikhail Rodchenko, was a theater props manager and his mother, Olga, a washerwoman. The family's social status did not provide much opportunity for the artistic education of talented Alexander. It is still unclear what training (if any) Rodchenko might have acquired as a child. The family moved to the city of Kazan in 1905. Two years later, Mikhail passed away, but they were able to allocate some of the family's scarce funds for Alexander's education.

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## ALEXANDER RODCHENKO LEGACY

As a key figure of the Russian modernist movement, the art of Alexander Rodchenko helped redefine three key visual genres of modernism: painting, photography, and graphic design. In his paintings, the artist further explored and expanded the essential vocabulary of an abstract composition. His series of purely abstract proto-monochrome paintings were influential to artists such as **Ad Reinhardt** and the **Minimalists** of the 1960s. In the field of photography, he established unprecedented compositional paradigms, which in many ways still define the entire notion of modern photographic art. Rodchenko's involvement with the Bolshevik cause further propelled the appreciation of his art in the leftist circles of the American avant-garde.

*Original content written by Ivan Savvine*

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COMMENT TO EDITOR

## ALEXANDER RODCHENKO QUOTES

"In order to educate man to a new longing, everyday familiar objects must be shown to him with totally unexpected perspectives and in unexpected situations. New objects should be depicted from different sides in order to provide a complete impression of the object."

"Future is our only objective."

"We had visions of a new world, industry, technology and science. We simultaneously invented and changed the world around us. We authored new notions of beauty and redefined art itself."

"I am convinced that representation would never be back the way it was and that non-representation will die out in its own turn, paving the way for something entirely new, the beginning of which I am feeling right now."

"One has to take several different shots of a subject, from different points of view and in different situations, as if one examined it in the round rather than looked through the same keyhole again and again."

"I want to take some quite incredible photographs that have never been taken before... pictures which are simple and complex at the same time, which will amaze and overwhelm people ... I must achieve this so that photography can begin to be considered a form of art."

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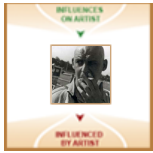
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### Alexander Rodchenko Influences


Interactive chart with Alexander Rodchenko's main influencers, and the people and ideas that the artist influenced in turn.  
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