

Topic Page: [Lissitzky, El \(Lazar\) \(1890 - 1941\)](#)

Summary Article: **Lissitzky, Lazar El (1890–1941)**

From *The Thames & Hudson Dictionary of Graphic Design and Designers*

Russian designer, painter, architect and photographer, born in Smolensk province. Studied architecture at Darmstadt Technische Hochschule, Germany, 1909–14, returning to Moscow in 1914 to pursue a career in architecture. In 1919 Marc Chagall, the principal of the Vitebsk School of Fine Arts, appointed Lissitzky to teach architecture and graphic arts. While there he met the painter Kasimir Malevich, creator of suprema-tism. A passionate supporter of the Russian Revolution, Lissitzky brought the philosophy of constructivism to industrial and graphic design. Along with contemporaries such as Alexander rodchenko and Vladimir Tatlin, he aspired to an accessible art for the proletariat. His graphic design uncompromisingly challenged typographic convention, with dynamic asymmetric layouts, changes of scale, and white space used as a positive formal element. In 1919 he designed the famous Soviet propaganda poster *Beat the Whites with the Red Wedge* and also created his first 'Proun', a series of Constructivist images that combined architectural concepts with painting; the term was taken from the Russian words meaning Project for Affirmation of the New. Moving to Berlin in 1921, he exploited the design opportunities presented by excellent printing facilities. Following contact with László moholy-nagy and Théo van doesburg, his work appeared in *de stijl* magazine. Committed to the propagation of his ideals, he organized the Constructivist Congress in 1922. In the same year he completed *Of Two Squares*, a children's book, and with Ilya Ehrenburg created the Soviet government periodical *Veshch* (Object). In 1923 he designed *For the Voice*, a book of poems by Mayakovsky. A victim of tuberculosis, Lissitzky moved to Switzerland in 1924. Jointly designed and edited a double issue of *merz* with Kurt schwitters (1924). In 1925, along with Hans Arp, he edited and designed *The Isms of Art 1914–1924*, an influential typographic achievement. In his work as a consultant designer, Lissitzky's relationship with the Pelikan ink company throughout the 1920s illustrates his ability to produce innovation within the constraints of a commercial brief. In 1925 he returned to Moscow to teach interior and furniture design at the Vhkutemas, the Russian bauhaus. Lissitzky's work provides a key link between contemporary graphic design and its roots in modernism. His pivotal role in typographic theory is generously acknowledged by Jan tschichold in his seminal text *Die neue Typographie* (1928). A much-travelled designer, he was a catalyst in establishing links between kindred spirits in Russia, Germany, Holland and Switzerland. See *also* colour section

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