

Kazimir Malevich,

From Cubism and Futurism to Suprematism: The New Realism in Painting (1915)

Only with the disappearance of a habit of mind which sees in pictures little corners of nature, Madonnas and shameless Venuses, *shall we witness a work of pure, living art.*

I have transformed myself *in the zero of form* and dragged myself out of the *rubbish-filled pool of Academic art.*

I have destroyed the ring of the horizon and escaped from the circle of things, from the horizon-ring which confines the artist and the forms of nature.

This accursed ring, which opens up newer and newer prospects, leads the artist away, from the *target of destruction.*

And only a cowardly consciousness and meager creative powers in an artist are deceived by this fraud and base *their art on the forms of nature*, afraid of losing the foundation on which the savage and the academy have based their art.

To reproduce beloved objects and little corners of nature is just like a thief being enraptured by his legs in irons.

Only dull and impotent artists screen their work with *sincerity.*

In art there is a need for *truth*, not *sincerity.*

Things have disappeared like smoke; to gain the new artistic culture, art approaches creation as an end in itself and domination over the forms of nature.

The Art of the Savage and its Principles

The savage was the first to found the principle of naturalism: fashioning his drawings out of a dot and five little sticks, he tried to recreate his own image.

This first attempt laid the basis for conscious imitation of the forms of nature. From this arose the aim of approaching the face of nature as closely as possible. And all the artists' efforts were directed towards the representation of her creative forms.

Collective art, or the art of copying, had its origin in the tracing of the savage's first primitive image.

Collective, because the real man with his subtle range of feelings, psychology and anatomy had not yet been discovered.

The savage saw neither his external image, nor his inner condition. His consciousness could only see the shape of a man, animal, etc.

And as his consciousness developed, so the scheme by which he depicted nature grew more complicated.

The further his consciousness embraced nature, the more complicated his work became and the more his knowledge and ability increased.

His consciousness developed only on one side, the side of nature's creation, and not on the side of new forms of art.

Therefore his primitive pictures cannot be considered as creative work.
The deformities in his pictures are the result of weakness on the technical side.
Technique, like consciousness, was only on the path of its development.
And his pictures must not be considered as Art. For inability is not art.
He merely pointed the way to art.

Consequently, the original scheme was a framework, on which the generations hung newer and newer discoveries made in nature.

And the scheme grew more complicated and achieved its flowering in the Ancient World and the Renaissance of art.

The masters of these two epochs portrayed man in his complete form, both inner and outer.

Man was assembled and his inner condition was expressed.

But despite their colossal mastery, they did not complete the savage's idea:

The reflection, as in a mirror, of nature on canvas.

And it is a mistake to believe that their age was the brightest flowering in art, and that the younger generation must at all costs strive towards this ideal.

Such a concept is false.

It diverts young forces from the contemporary stream of life, thereby demoralizing them.

Their bodies fly in airplanes, but art and life are covered with the old robes of Nero and Titians.

Thus they are unable to see the new beauty of our modern life. For they live by the beauty of past ages.

So the Realists, Impressionists, Cubism, Futurism and Suprematism were not understood.

These last-mentioned artists cast off the robes of the past and came out into contemporary life to find a new beauty.

And I say:

That no torture-chamber of the Academies can withstand the passage of time.

Forms move and are born, and we make newer and newer discoveries.

And what I reveal to you, do not conceal.

And it is absurd to force *our* age into the old forms of time past.

[...]

In copying or tracing the forms of nature we have fed our consciousness with a false understanding of art.

The work of the Primitives has been taken for creation.

That of the Classics—also creation. [...]

The transferring of real objects onto canvas is the art of skilful reproduction, and *only* that.

And between the art of creating and the art of copying there is a great difference.

[...]

The artist can be a creator only when the forms in his picture have nothing in common with nature.

For art is the ability to construct, not on the interrelation of form and color, and not on an aesthetic basis of beauty in composition, *but on the basis of weight speed and the direction of movement.*

Forms must be given life and the right to individual existence. [. ..]

An artist is under the obligation to be a free creator, but not a freebooter.

An artist is given talent in order that he may give to life his share of creation and increase the flow of life. Only in absolute creation will he acquire his right.

And this is possible when we free all our art from vulgar subject-matter and teach our consciousness to see everything in nature not as real forms and objects, but as material masses from which forms must be made, which have nothing in common with nature.

Thus the habit of seeing Madonnas and Venuses in pictures, with fat, playful cupids, will disappear.

Color and texture in painting are ends in themselves. They are the essence of painting, but this essence has always been destroyed by the subject.

And if the masters of the Renaissance had discovered the surface of painting, it would have been much more exalted and valuable than any Madonna or Gioconda.

And any carved-out pentagon or hexagon would have been a greater work of sculpture than the Venus de Milo or David.

[...]

Academic realists—they are the last descendants of the savage.

It is they who go about in the worn-out robes of the past.

And again, as before, some have thrown off this greasy robe.

And given the rag-merchant from the Academy a slap in the face with their declaration of Futurism.

They began with a mighty movement to beat on the consciousness, like nails in a stone wall.

To pull you out of the catacombs into the speed of our time.

I affirm that whoever has not trod the path of Futurism as the exponent of modern life, is condemned to crawl for ever among the ancient graves and feed on the crusts of the past.

Futurism opened the “new” in modern life: the beauty of speed.

And through speed we move more swiftly.

And we who only yesterday were Futurists, arrived through speed at new forms, at new relationships with nature and things.

We arrived at Suprematism, leaving Futurism as a loop-hole through which those left behind will pass.

We have abandoned Futurism; and we, the most daring, *have spat on the altar of its art.*

But can cowards spit on their idols.

Like we did yesterday!!!

I tell you, you will not see the new beauty and the truth, until you make up your minds to spit. [. . .]

We did not renounce Futurism because it was languishing, and its end was approaching. No. The beauty of speed which it discovered is eternal and the new will still be revealed to many.

As we run to our goal through the speed of Futurism, thought moves more swiftly, and whoever finds himself in Futurism is nearer to this aim and further from the past.

And your lack of understanding is quite natural. How can a man who always rides in a gig understand the experiences and impressions of one who travels in an express, or flies through the air?

The Academy is a moldy vault, in which art flagellates itself.

Huge wars, great inventions, conquest of the air, speed of travel, telephones, telegraphs, dreadnoughts—the realm of electricity.

But our young artists paint Neros and half-naked Roman warriors.

All honor to the Futurists, who forbade the painting of female hams, the painting of portraits and guitars in moonlight.

They took an enormous step forward, they gave up meat and glorified the machine.

But meat and the machine are the muscles of life.

Both are the bodies in which life moves.

Here two worlds have collided.

The world of meat and the world of iron.

Both forms are the organs of utilitarian reason.

And the relationship of the artist to the forms which things take in life has to be explained.

Until now the artist always pursued the thing.

Thus the new Futurism pursues the machine of to-day's speed.

These are both kinds of art: the old and the new, Futurism, are behind the running forms.

And the question arises: will this aim in painting justify its existence?

No!

Because in pursuing the form of airplanes or automobile, we shall always be anticipating new cast-of forms of technical life ...

And secondly:

In pursuing the form of things, we cannot discover painting as an end in itself, the way to direct creation.

Painting will remain the means of reproducing this or that condition of the forms of life.

But the Futurists forbade the depiction of nakedness not for the sake of giving freedom to painting or words to act as ends in themselves. But because of the change in the technical side of life.

The new life of iron and the machine, the roar of automobiles, the glitter of electric lights, the whirring of propellers, have awoken the soul, which was stifling in the catacombs of ancient reason and has emerged on the roads woven between earth and sky.

If all artists could see the crossroads of these celestial paths, if they could comprehend these monstrous runways and the weaving of our bodies with the clouds in the sky, then they would not paint chrysanthemums.

The dynamic of movement has directed thought to produce the dynamic of plastic painting.

But the efforts of the Futurists to produce purely plastic painting as such, were not crowned with success.

They could not abandon subject-matter, which would have made their task easier.

When they had driven reason halfway off the surface of the picture (the old callous of habit that sees every thing naturalistically), they were able to make a picture of the new life, of new things, but only this.

In the depiction of movement, the wholeness of things *vanished* as their flashing particles hid themselves among other running bodies.

And in constructing the parts of the running objects, they tried to depict only the impression of movement.

But in order to depict the movement of modern life, one must operate with its forms.

Which made the arrival of painting at its goal more difficult.

But however it was done, consciously or unconsciously, for the sake of movement, or for the sake of depicting impressions, the wholeness of things was violated.

And in this breaking-up and violation of wholeness lay the hidden meaning which the naturalistic aim had concealed.

The aim underlying this destruction was not primarily that of depicting the movement of things, but that of their destruction for the sake of the pure essence of painting; that is, towards an approach to non-objective creation. [...]

Having overthrown reason, the Futurists proclaimed intuition as the subconscious.

However, they created their pictures not from the subconscious forms of intuition, but employed the forms of utilitarian reason. [. . .]

The intuitive, it seems to me, should reveal itself in forms which are unconscious and without response.

I consider that it was necessary to understand the intuitive in art as the aim of our selective feeling towards objects. And it followed a purely conscious path, decisively forcing its way through the artist.

It appears as two levels of consciousness fighting between themselves.

But the consciousness, accustomed to the training of utilitarian reason, could not accord with the sense which led to the destruction of the world of objects.

The artist did not understand this aim, and, submitting to this sense, betrayed reason and disfigured the form.

Creation by utilitarian reason has a specific purpose.

But intuitive creation has no utilitarian purpose. Until now we have had no such manifestation of Intuition in art.

In art all pictures emerge from creative forms of a utilitarian order. All the naturalists' pictures have the same form as in nature.

The intuitive form should emerge from nothing.

In the same way that Reason, which creates things for everyday life, takes them from nothing and perfects them. [...]

The artist should now know what, and why, things happen in his pictures. Formerly he lived by some kind of mood. He awaited the rising of the moon, twilight, put green shades on his lamps, and this all attuned his mood like a violin.

But when asked why this face was crooked, or green, he could not give an exact answer. "I want it so, I like it like that..."

In the end this desire was ascribed to intuitive will.

Consequently the intuitive feeling did not speak clearly. And in that case, its condition was not only subconscious, but totally unconscious.

Paintings were a tangle of these concepts. The picture was half real, half deformed.

Being; a painter, I ought to say why in pictures people's faces are painted green and red. The picture—paint, color—lies within our organism. Its outbursts are great and demanding.

My nervous system is colored by them.

My brain burns with their colors.

But color was oppressed by common-sense, was enslaved by it. And the spirit of color weakened and died out.

But when it conquered common-sense, then the colors flowed onto the detested form of real things.

The colors matured, but their form did not mature in the consciousness.

This is why faces and bodies were red, green and blue.

But this was the portent leading to the creation of forms in painting which were ends in themselves.

Now it is necessary to give the body shape and lend it a living form in real life.

And this will be when forms emerge from the mass of the painting; that is, they will arise in the same way that utilitarian forms arose.

Such forms will not be copies of living things in life, but will themselves be a living thing.

A painted surface is a real, living form.

Intuitive feeling is now becoming conscious, not longer is it subconscious.

Or even, rather, the other way round—it was always conscious, only the artist was unable to interpret its demands.

The forms of Suprematism, the new realism in painting, are already proof of the construction of forms from nothing, discovered by Intuitive Reason.

In Cubism, the attempt to disfigure the forms of reality and the breaking-up of objects represent the striving of the will towards the independent life of the forms which it has created.

Futurist Painting

[...] The Futurists hold the dynamic of three-dimensional form to be of prime importance in painting.

But in failing to destroy the world of objects, they achieve only the dynamic of things.

Therefore Futurist paintings and all those of by-gone artists can be reduced from twenty colors to one, and not lose their impression.

Repin's picture, *Ivan the Terrible*, could be devoid of color and still give us the same impressions of horror as in color.

The subject will always kill color and we shall not notice it.

Then, when the faces painted green and red to a certain extent kill the subject, the color is more noticeable. And color is that by which a painting lives: which means it is the most important.

And here I have arrived at pure color forms.

And Suprematism is the pure art of painting, whose independence cannot be reduced to a single color.

The gallop of a horse can be depicted with a pencil of one color.

But it is impossible to depict the movement of red, green or blue masses with a pencil.

Painters should abandon subject and objects if they wish to be pure painters.

This demand for the dynamic of plastic painting indicates the need for the mass in painting to emerge from the object and arrive at the domination of form as an end in itself over content and things, at non-objective Suprematism—at the new realism in art, at absolute creation.

Futurism approaches the dynamism of painting through the academism of form.

And the path of both forces leads to Suprematism in painting.

If we examine the art of Cubism, and ask what energy in objects roused the intuitive feeling to activity, we shall see that the energy in painting was secondary.

The very object itself, together with its essence, purpose, sense, or the fullness of its presentation, the Cubists thought, were also unnecessary.

Until now it seemed that the beauty of objects was preserved when they were transferred whole into the picture, their essence being revealed especially in the crudeness of the line, or in its simplification.

But it transpired that one more situation of objects was discovered, which reveals to us the new beauty.

Namely: intuitive feeling discovered in objects the energy from the dissonance obtained in the collision of two opposed forms.

Objects embody a mass of moments in time. Their forms are various, and consequently their depictions are various.

All these aspects of time in things and their anatomy—the rings of a tree—have become more important than their essence and meaning.

And these new situations were adopted by the Cubists as a means of constructing pictures.

At the same time these means were so constructed that the unexpected collision of two forms would provide a dissonance of the greatest force of tension.

And the scale of each form is arbitrary.

Which justifies the appearance of parts of real objects in positions not relating to nature.

In achieving this new beauty, or simply energy, we have freed ourselves from the impression of the wholeness of objects.

The millstone round the neck of painting is beginning to crack.

An object painted according to the principle of Cubism can be considered finished when its dissonances are exhausted.

Nevertheless, all forms which repeat themselves should be omitted by the artist as copies.

But if the artist finds little tension in the picture, he is free to take them from another object.

Consequently in Cubism the principle of the transference of objects falls down.

A picture is made, but the object is not transferred.

Whence this conclusion:

If for thousands of years past the artist has tried to approach the depiction of an object as closely as possible, to present its essence and meaning, then in our era of Cubism the artist has destroyed objects together with their meaning, essence and purpose.

The new picture has sprung from their fragments.

Objects have vanished like smoke, for the sake of the new culture of art.

[...]

There is no more love of little corners, there is no more love for which the truth of art was betrayed.

The square is not a subconscious form. It is the creation of intuitive reason.

It is the face of the new art.

The square is a living, royal infant.

It is the first step of pure creation in art. Before it, there were naive deformities and copies of nature.

Our world of art has become new, non-objective, pure.

Everything has vanished, there remains a mass of material, from which the new forms will be built.

In the art of Suprematism forms will live, like all living forms of nature.

These forms announce that man has gained his equilibrium by arriving from a state of single reasoning at one of double reasoning.

Utilitarian reasoning and intuitive reasoning.

The new realism in painting is very much realism in painting, for it contains no realism of mountains, sky, water ...

Until now there was realism of objects, but not of painted units of color, which are constructed so that they depend neither on form, nor on color, nor on their position relative to each other.

Each form is free and individual. Each form is a world.

Any painting surface is more alive than any face from which a pair of eyes and a grin jut out.

A face painted in a picture gives a pitiful parody of life, and this allusion is only a reminder of the living.

But a surface lives, it has been born. The grave reminds us of a dead person, a picture of a living one.

Or on the contrary, a living face, a landscape in nature, reminds us of a picture, i.e. of something dead.

This is why it is strange to look at a red or black painted surface.

This is why they snigger and spit at the exhibitions of new movements.

Art and its new aims were always a spittoon.

But cats grow accustomed to a place and it is difficult to train them to a new one.

For such people art is absolutely unnecessary. As long as there are pictures of their grandmother and their favorite little corners of lilac groves.

Everything runs from the past to the future, but everything should live by the present, for in the future the apple-trees will shed their blossom.

Tomorrow will wipe out the trace of the present, and you will not catch up with the pace of life.

The mire of the past, like a millstone, will drag you into the slough.

This is why I hate all those who supply you with monuments to the dead.

The Academy and the critics are this millstone. Round your neck are the old realism and the movement which strives towards the reproduction of living nature.

They act in the same way as in the times of the Grand Inquisition.

Their aims are laughable, because they want at all costs to force what they take from nature to live on the canvas.

At the same time as everything is running and breathing, there are their frozen poses in pictures. And this torture is worse than breaking on the wheel. Sculptured statues, inspired (which means living), stand in their tracks, posed in movement.

Is this not torture?

Setting the soul in marble and then mocking the living.

But your pride is an artist who knows how to torture.

You put birds in a cage also for pleasure.

And for the sake of knowledge you keep animals in zoological gardens.

I am fortunate to have broken out of that torture-chamber of the Inquisition which is academicism.

I have arrived at the surface and can take the dimension of a living body.

But I shall use the dimension from which I shall create the new.

I have released all the birds from the eternal cage, and opened the gates to the animals in zoological gardens.

May they tear to pieces and devour the remains of your art.

And may the freed bear bathe his body in the ice of the frozen north and not languish in the aquarium of boiled water in the academic garden.

You may delight in the composition of a painting, but surely composition is the sentence of death to a figure condemned by the artist to an eternal pose.

Your delight is the confirmation of this sentence.

The Group of Suprematists: K. Malevich, I. Puni, M. Men'kov, I. Klyun, K. Boguslavskaya, and Rozanova, has led the struggle for the freedom of objects from the obligations of art.

And calls upon the Academy to renounce the inquisition of nature.

The instrument of torture is idealism and the demands of aesthetic feeling.

The idealization of the form of man is the mortification of much living sinew.
Aestheticism is the garbage of intuitive feeling.
You want to see pieces of living nature on the hooks of your walls.
Just as Nero admired the torn bodies of people and animals from the zoological garden.
I say to all: reject love, reject aestheticism, reject the trunks of wisdom, for in the new
culture your wisdom is laughable and insignificant.
I have united the knots of wisdom and set free the consciousness of color!
Remove from yourselves quickly the hardened skin of centuries, so that you may catch us
up the more easily.
I have overcome the impossible and formed gulfs with my breathing.
You are in the nets of the horizon, like fish!
We, Suprematists, throw open the way to you.
Hurry!
For tomorrow you will not recognize us.