



Russian Avant Garde

Russia, 1913. Empire is collapsing, war is looming, workers are striking. Out of this mayhem, creativity flourishes – particularly in theatres, where ground-breaking productions attract the edgiest artists to design sets and costumes and spread the socialist message. This is the backdrop to the **Victoria & Albert Museum's** 'Russian Avant-Garde Theatre: War, Revolution and Design, 1913-1933' (to 25 January) which is showing these revolutionary set and costume designs in the UK for the first time.

Designed in a labyrinth with Communist Red walls, the show disorients the viewer in its evocation of the turbulent times. Yet optimism pervades whether with humour like Isaac Rabinovich's *Gluttons*, or Nina Aizenberg's loved up factory workers. Early works by star names point to their future. Kasimir Malevich's black square backdrops for the opera, *Victory over the Sun* pre-empt his later Suprematist pieces, whereas Sergei Eisenstein's colourful, graphic designs reveal a fresh side to his silent movie montages. The breaking down of artistic disciplines still has resonance today as art expands – into music and more.

Another avant garde Russian artist making a London debut is Leonid Borisov (1943-2013). His simple, geometric works from the

1970s to 2012 are at Mayfair's Gallery Elena Shchukina to 16 January 2015. Eschewing the social realism of the Soviet Nonconformists as well as the conceptualism of today's Russian artists, Borisov's playful approach has made him distinctive. Yet there are sly subversive digs. Consider the childlike battleship Aurora sailing gaily down the river. Its innocence belies its violent role in Russia's history – a gunshot from the ship signalled the attack on the Winter Palace which kickstarted the 1917 October Revolution. For a bitesize look at today's emerging avant garde, the Erarta Contemporary Art Gallery has a group show to 17 January. Ilya Gapanov innovatively uses coal material, bitumen and varnish on his hometown for his cinematic paintings, whilst Pavel Brat fuses art, fashion, beauty, design and advertising in his collages.

Photography: War & Peace

As war rages in Syria and unrest bubbles in Chechnya and the Ukraine, the show 'Conflict, Time, Photography' at **Tate Modern** is a timely reminder of war's devastating effects at the time and into the far future. For this show takes an innovative curatorial approach, looking at the different conflicts through specific moments, from the immediate effects as Luc

Delahaye captures the rising smoke as the US bombard the Taliban in Afghanistan 2001 to Chloe Dewe Mathews' haunting locations where First World War deserters were shot, taken nearly a century later in 2013.

The physical scars have deeper impact whether on buildings, days, months, or years later, even on people's faces – like Shomei Tomatsu's scarred women living in Nagasaki 20 years after the atomic bombing.

At the opposite end of the spectrum, the architectural photography show at the **Barbican Art Gallery** (to 11 January) looks at how, construction builds societies rather than destroys them. Berenice Abbott's new New York skyscrapers in the 1930s which gave the city its bustle, or Guy Tillim's desolated post colonial African apartment buildings suggesting disappointed dreams. There is Lucien Hervé's spiritual evocation of Le Corbusier's Chandigarh and Ed Ruscha's gritty rather than glamorous aerial view of Los Angeles. Ironically, Nadav Kandar calmly depicts China's rapid urbanisation with his award winning poetic images alongside the Yangtze River.

Melanie Abrams

from left: Konstantin Vlasov 'Costume Design for Stepan-Razin' 1923, at V&A. Lucien Hervé 'High Court of Justice, Chandigarh' 1955, at the Barbican. Chloe Dewe Mathews 'Verbranden-Molen, West Vlaanderen 2013' at Tate Modern