



Lisa Radford
T 61 432014446
lisa_radford7@gmail.com

23 February 2013 - 06 February 2013

Meredith Turnbull
c/o The Other Side

Dear Meredith,

I am sitting at a picnic bench supported by castors resting on AstroTurf in, what feels like, the open-air centre of QV. To my left is the Queen Victoria Women's Centre, built in Queen Anne style by JJ Clark, it is what remains of the old Queen Vic Hospital building. Behind, in front and to my right, students, city residents and tourists decide on whether they will consume something from Max Brenner's Chocolate Bar with its Kangaroo Cups and Hug Mugs designed by Iris Zohar, a burger from the literally named Grilled or Japanese fine food from Hanaichi. Some like me, choose to simply exploit what looks like public space. I've always thought the design of the Hanaichi franchise stores was rather odd - something about the exterior resembling a Chemist contrasting with the interior that reads as a Red Rooster — minus the chicken and microphone. The space I am sitting in is somewhat of a threshold, albeit it a threshold within a \$600-million space, 1.8 hectares in size and home to apartments and the BHP Billiton headquarters. It is a windy square inside a square formed via the arrangement of faux laneways - perhaps the Las Vegas version of those small squares you come across nestled in-between a labyrinth of smaller streets found in Barcelona, perhaps all of Europe, minus the complacency and the bling of the multi-national trimmings¹.

The threshold. I guess this is what I have been thinking about in reference to your exhibition at The Other Side. Spaces that we move through to get somewhere else. I am thinking about this with particular reference to your statement which declares that you explore the 'territory between the intimate, interior and large-scales'. Sitting at my laptop writing to you in a pre-fab pro-forma called 'Classic Letter' in this massive 'faux-but-po-mo-public' space while wafes of pre-fab-Japanese curry permeate the air, it is hard not to question this space that is both a terrain for consuming and to be consumed by.

The space you are making work for is a type of threshold to an office - do you remember the MIR11 project run by our friend Masato, Jan van Schaick and Anton Marin, and then Danny Lacy and Justin Andrews? The aesthetics and politics of this space were challenged when the architects that 'owned' the space decided that the art works which inhabited the MIR11 threshold gallery space were unworthy of visiting clients. An 'appropriate' painting hung in their place. Within the history of design and art, the space between adornment, decoration and political subjectivity is sometimes defined by those that play no role in its production.

I am at home now, and I am wearing your necklace, a necklace you made. Actually, I am always wearing one of your necklaces, this one is the wooden one that everyone thinks is made from cuisenaire blocks - an assumption that we wear what was *once* utilitarian, not *is*? And I am still thinking about this space of production. In a small catalogue that documents Christoph Weber's work *The First Minutes of October*, Ekatrina Degot discusses when artists from the Bauhaus were first shown in Moscow and no-one really liked them. Degot quotes critic Alexei Sidorov: The products of German constructivism all had an air of prosperity; everything was so impeccable and precisely fitted, straightened out, hammered together, and lit by electric lamps; everything looked like a neat little toy. As Degot denotes and Groys² too has acknowledged, this is a move away from fetishisation, where the figure formerly known as painter or sculptor under capitalism is now set the task of designing murals and leaflets or writing theoretical texts - the dematerialisation of the object via the process of utility, with the aim of evading reification³.

When I think about your sourced patterns and self-referenced images of recent-but-previously-made DIY craft sources⁴, and your own sculptures previously exhibited and documented and now presented as archival-cum-nostalgic B+W photos, I am reminded of images such as Alexandra Khokhlova modeling a dress designed by Nadezhda Lamanova in 1924. Lamanova's dress, which we might now read as origami like in form, is woven with a strong linear pattern design, which, when cut on the bias, creates an intersection of diagonals, horizontals and verticals. Khokhlova poses as if in angular 'little-teapot' mode. Khohova is elegant and proud, presenting, it seems, herself then the dress. In an artist's statement in the catalogue of exhibition *5 x 5 = 25* (1921), Varvara Stepanova writes: 'Technology and industry have confronted art with the problem of

¹ Norman Day kind of summed up a type of design complacency when he described the development as 'architecture for generation X, once stereotyped (in *The Washington Post*) as a group, of slackers, cynics, whiners, drifters and malcontents, but also as ambitious, savvy, independent, pragmatic and self-sufficient, go-getters who are just doing it - but their way... By inspection, these architects got it right. <http://www.theage.com.au/articles/2004/03/09/1078594345810.html>, accessed Feb 2, 2013.

² Boris Groys, *The Obligation to Self-Design*, e-flux Journal, #0, November, 2008, <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/the-obligation-to-self-design/> accessed 02 February, 2013

³ Alexei Sidorov in Ekatrina Degot, *The Inevitability of Stardom* catalogue essay for Christopher Weber, *The First Minutes of October*, Verlag für moderne Kunst Nürnberg, 2009, p. 115.

⁴ You told me that you have sourced many of the patterns from the first English language translation of a book by Gisela Hein called 'Fabric Printing' published by B. T. Batsford Ltd in 1972 - both you and I have tried to find further information on Hein, but this has proven difficult.

CONSTRUCTION as a dynamic action and as contemplative visuality. The sacred value of the work as something singular and unique has been eliminated. As the depository of this "unicum" the museum turns into an archive⁵. There is a predetermined sense of loss in Stepanova's statement, where the operative of the work has already been consumed and distorted, and I wonder, if it is this that you touch on by your sampling, and remaking of the patterns made perhaps, by our contemporary equivalents of Stepanova and Liubov Popova. Stepanova and Popova — women who started designing for the First State Textile Factory following a call to artists to work with industry, turning their functional non-objective patterns from objects d'art into National attire. Just after the Bolshevik revolution in 1917, the Second Modern Decorative Arts Exhibition opened at the Mikhailova Salon in the centre of Moscow, 400 works by sixteen artists including Popova and one assumes Stepanova. The exhibition was visited by an American theatre critic Oliver M. Saylor who was researching Russia for forthcoming plays. Since 1917, all that remains of the exhibition is the 17 photographs he took. Most of the actual fabric and other articles have been lost or destroyed.⁶ Which brings us back to your works as contemporary archive.

A major industry prior, but following the revolution the links between the Fashion Houses in Paris and the textile industry in Russia were broken. With Stepanova and Popova's appointment at the First State Textile Factory, I am imagining them along with Alexandra Exter, Natalia Goncharova, Olga Rozanova, and Nadezhda Udaltsova in round-table-conversation with Sophie Taeuber-Arp, Claude Cahun, Sonia Delaunay, Germaine Dulac, Florence Henri, Hannah Höch, Katarzyna Kobro and Dora Maa. A round table of women makers sharing camaraderie and independence, because as Art History has finally acknowledged, they were always liberated in conversation from their male partners, discussing painting and utilitarian design, the material elements of everyday life and the infinite permutations for organisation of the object. Perhaps they would discuss being a woman artist at the beginning of the twentieth century — being post-object and freed from the representation as nude passive object, or perhaps they would chat about Malevich's embroidery designs (a skill he learnt from his mother), or the handbags Puni designed, Cubism v Supremetisim v subject v content, and between abstraction and representation. Rumor has it, for all of Popova's pro-industrial comments, she loved to hand-sew Rodchenko's overalls for the people. Perhaps they would discuss the elimination of natural form, the necessity for concrete tasks and the intimacy of the individual versus the large scale of the state, and all the insecurities, complexities and contradictions that come along with, well, living.

Goncharova, in a letter to critic Boris Anrep asks: 'Why do you write about the distance separating the artist and his work like that? Is it really so important that an artist remain completely bound together with his work? Man is a complex machine, perpetually moving and changing, and a work, once completed, becomes a static thing with its own individual life, a life that lasts longer than that of the individual who created it: the difference between the two has always existed and always will.'⁷ The space Goncharova is perhaps talking about is an intimate shared space, an interior social defined by a collective of individuals — 'Nonetheless, the material of the work and beyond that, its creative spirit, lies not in the individual, but in the people, in the nation to which the individual belongs...'⁸. Perhaps no longer national, one might think a certain amount of homogeneity is (still?) contained within our experiences of production and I wonder, are our co-workers many?

Sincerely,

Lisa

PS- I have just had a thought - perhaps Goncharova and Popova are both talking about a threshold that is beyond themselves, the work being the threshold to spaces other than physical? Popova when discussing a shift between periods of work says: '*Spatial Force Constructions*, which succeeds the *Painterly Architectonics*, produce the impression of consonance and stability thanks to the interactive energy of difference, forms directions and forces. Now, movement unfolds, not in real space, but in new unearthly dimensions...'⁹. Beyond the confines of the wall or body they are presented in and on.

⁵ Varvara Stepanova artist's statement in the catalogue of exhibition *5 x 5 = 25* (1921) in John E. Bowlt and Matthew Drutt (eds), *Amazons of the Avant-Garde: Alexandra Exter, Natalia Goncharova, Liubov Popova, Olga Rozanova, Varvara Stepanova and Nadezhda Udaltsova*, Guggenheim, NY, 2000, p.315

⁶ Charlotte Douglas, *Suprematist Embroidered Ornament*, Art Journal, Vol. 54, No. 1, Clothing as Subject (Spring, 1995), p. 45

⁷ Natalia Goncharova in a letter to Boris Anrep, 1914 in John E. Bowlt and Matthew Drutt (eds), *Amazons of the Avant-Garde: Alexandra Exter, Natalia Goncharova, Liubov Popova, Olga Rozanova, Varvara Stepanova and Nadezhda Udaltsova*, Guggenheim, NY, 2000, p.314

⁸ *ibid.*

⁹ Dimitri Sarabianov, *Liubov Popova and Artistic Synthesis* in John E. Bowlt and Matthew Drutt (eds), *Amazons of the Avant-Garde: Alexandra Exter, Natalia Goncharova, Liubov Popova, Olga Rozanova, Varvara Stepanova and Nadezhda Udaltsova*, Guggenheim, NY, 2000, p.195.

THE
OTHER
SIDE

CO-WORKERS, INTERIOR WORLD
Meredith Turnbull
22 February – 26 April, 2013

LEVEL 10 / 221 QUEEN STREET MELBOURNE
MONDAY > FRIDAY 10AM-6PM
OR BY APPOINTMENT

Cover: Meredith Turnbull, *Co-workers, fabric window IV & VIII*