

The Folds of the Revolution

(1917 - 2017)

A moment is conceivable in which real life, saturated with art to the utmost, rejects art because of its redundancy, and this moment will be a blessing for the future artist, a wonderful, 'you are free'.
(N. F. Tschuzhak, Moskwa-Petrograd, 1923)

The Russian artist Vladimir Tatlin (1885 – 1953) considered the design of clothing models as an important task in the curriculum of the National Institute of Artistic Culture (GINChUK).

The photograph of a sports coat made of impregnated material, which Tatlin himself models is well known. Issue No. 23/1924 of the magazine *Krasnaja Panorama* (The Red Gazette) contains a reproduction of the photograph with an accompanying detailed description of the coat. The coat shown has the following characteristics: "At the shoulders and the hips, it is noticeably wide, at the hem it is narrower. Despite this tightness, the material does not adhere to the lower body yet has the advantage of preventing cold air from entering. The resulting layer of air within keeps the wearer warm and creates optimal hygienic conditions according to the principle of thermal insulation." Since the jacket consists of three independent parts which can be assembled as required, the individual parts can be replaced by new ones if the material is worn.

Tatlin strove to underscore the new social and cultural function of clothing and considered this a programmatic task. He advocated a style of clothing that was independent of the social position of the wearer and lacking any prestige characteristics, thereby liberating people from the artificial rules of etiquette and conveying a sense of freedom.

Tatlin designed profit-making, functional garments, everyday clothes that could be worn on all occasions, including dresses that were practical yet beautiful in the modern sense. In the construction of his universal clothing, he used elements taken from sportswear and various forms of work clothes. The characteristics of the form included: cut upwards, wide sleeves, stitched edges with concealed button strip.

In the design of clothing, Tatlin's standpoint diverged from the views of constructivist artists at the Moscow Institute of Artistic Culture (INCHhUK).

Ultimately, the constructivists saw their task above all as to design different types of work clothes. Tatlin, however, created everyday clothes that combined the forms of work wear and leisurewear. Beauty in clothing design can be construed in terms of the conception of the body either as a mass or as a silhouette. Tatlin, in preliminary drafts of his designs, incorporated a total expression in terms of body mass. His large, simply designed suits appear rustic yet at the same time elegant. He emphasized the basic structure of the form utilizing his own details: casual, rounded shoulders, both wide and narrow cuts, deep armholes, closely knit necklines. He was aware of both the cut of the traditional shirt and of the latest fashions, he was further influenced by the forms that came out of the cubism movement.

His sports coats and suits consist of very few elements, but within this small range he used various geometric shapes in a comparatively complicated way. Rather than rectangles, he used trapezoidal shapes which contrasted with the curved forms used for rounded shoulders and cylindrical sleeves.

In the contemporary works of the Russian clothing designers, the expressiveness of clothing was mostly based on the geometrical silhouette, whose rhythm was subordinated to the shape of the human body. Tatlin did not particularly emphasize the cutting line because he wanted to realize the expressiveness of clothing in a sculptural unity of clothes and human body.

Of course, Tatlin was not a professional garment designer. What he created in this field is only one aspect of his work. He did not wish to design individual garments and dealt purely with the type of clothing which was to be produced applying the then most widely used and inexpensive materials in serial production. He invented a constructive, logically simplified, and cost effective cutting method, which in its simplicity eliminated the necessity for a schematic.

We must also emphasize the fundamental importance of the fact that Tatlin designed the clothes "for himself" so to speak. He personally supervised the making of the jacket, coat, and suit models in the workshop of the Petrodeshda (from 1924 Leningradshda Trust „Leningrad - Clothing“), tried them on personally and presented them himself. Thus, he designed the "150,000,000" type apparel as if he had designed it for himself. Such a valuation category was essentially democratic.

The clothing models of this new type exerted a great effect on the rapporteurs at the exhibition of Petrograd artists when they were presented to the public for the first time in 1923. But Tatlin's ideas – like so many others in the renewal of material culture – were not able to break through the intellectual and technical limitations, despite the recognition they often found. Decades later they became a worldwide trend. The principle which Tatlin applied was from the end of the sixties, decisive for fashion throughout the world.

Taken from: Larissa Alexejewna Shadowa, *Tatlin. The Artist of Material Culture, Apparel Designs*, Dresden: VEB Verlag der Kunst, 1984.

* This is a reference to Majakowski's Poem 150,000,000, which he wrote in the name of one hundred and fifty million people – the population of Russia at that time - intentionally omitting his own name as author.