

# HA2G7-15 Icons and Iconoclasm: Art and the Russian Revolution

**26/27**

**Department**

SCAPVC - History of Art

**Level**

Undergraduate Level 2

**Module leader**

Kamila Kocialkowska

**Credit value**

15

**Module duration**

10 weeks

**Assessment**

60% coursework, 40% exam

**Study location**

University of Warwick main campus, Coventry

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## Description

### Introductory description

This module will survey the artistic and cultural production in the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union from 1880 to the 1930s, focusing, in-depth, on the post-revolutionary years of 1917-1925. The course will examine the interplay between art, politics, and society during this transformative period, highlighting the impact of revolutionary ideologies, rapid industrialisation, and cultural policy on artistic output.

### Module aims

The module explores how the political upheavals which led to the formation of the Soviet Union impacted artistic production. Its primary aim is to provide students with detailed knowledge of the visual culture of this period. In doing so, it challenges the chronology of canonical Western Art History via a comparative study of a region which remains often marginalised in modernist narratives.

The module begins by surveying the legacy of critical realism and academic painting in nineteenth-century Russia. Students explore how the familiar periodisation of Art History is collapsed and complicated through a case study of Eastern European culture. We explore the connectivity of

international artistic networks in this region and evaluate why certain outposts have historically been overlooked by academic study.

A major theme of the course is the emergence and evolution of artistic modernism. Students explore canonical avant-garde movements including Constructivism and Suprematism, studying how their radical aesthetic innovations hastened the evolution of abstract art. The course reflects on the symbolic power of iconoclasm (both as metaphorical and literal acts of artistic destruction) and questions the extent to which the destruction of art can be a regenerative part of culture that produces new signs even as it removes others.

We discuss the utilitarian ethos of Soviet art, exploring how ideology was manifest in design, ranging from architecture to everyday textiles. The course concludes by studying the consolidation of artistic expression under Stalin. We study the visual valences of socialist realism and discuss how recent research challenges the historically rigid binaries of modernism/realism in favour of more nuanced models of cultural expression.

## Outline syllabus

This is an indicative module outline only to give an indication of the sort of topics that may be covered. Actual sessions held may differ.

1. Introduction: A Revolution in Culture
2. Critical Realism: The Academy and its Artist Rebels
3. Anarchism & Abstraction
4. Suprematism: From Studio to Home to Street
5. The Constructivist Line
6. Class Trip: Avant-Garde books in the British Museum
7. Into Production! Textile & Clothing Design
8. Photomontage, Photography, Factography
9. Architecture & Agitation
10. Socialist Realism: Art under Stalin

## Learning outcomes

By the end of the module, students should be able to:

- Demonstrate a comprehensive knowledge of key works of art produced in the Russian Empire and Soviet Union between 1880 and 1936.
- Examine the historical context of the Russian Revolution, the underlying factors which led to the collapse of the Imperial dynasty, and the guiding ideologies of the Bolshevik regime.
- Evaluate the relationships between relevant artworks and the changing cultural policies of the Imperial, early Soviet, and Stalinist regimes.
- Compare and criticise the different methodological and theoretical approaches that scholars have developed to interpret the visual culture of this period.

## Indicative reading list

[Reading lists can be found in Talis](#)

## Interdisciplinary

This course content will provide interdisciplinary overlap for students in the departments of History and Modern Languages and Culture.

## Subject specific skills

1. Historical Contextualisation  
Ability to situate artworks within the political, social, and cultural changes of the Russian Empire and Soviet Union (1880–1936).  
Understanding how revolutionary ideologies shaped artistic movements during this period
2. Visual Analysis and Critical Interpretation  
Developing skills to closely analyse artworks and interpret them via a range of methodological approaches
3. Historiographical Awareness  
Evaluating how different scholars have interpreted the art of this period and region across time. Understanding the impact of Cold War ideologies on the study of revolutionary art in Western and Russian scholarship.
4. Archival and Source Analysis  
Developing the ability to analyse primary sources, particularly artist's manifestos

## Transferable skills

1. Critical Thinking and Analysis  
Evaluating complex relationships between art, politics, and society, fostering the ability to assess diverse perspectives. Synthesising information from multiple sources to form coherent arguments.
  2. Research Skills  
Conducting in-depth research using a variety of sources, including primary documents, scholarly texts, and visual materials. Developing the ability to identify reliable information and assess its relevance to specific topics.
  3. Written Communication  
Crafting clear, structured, and persuasive written arguments. Marshalling evident effective in support of a specific position
  4. Visual Literacy  
Interpreting visual materials to extract meaning, a skill relevant to media analysis, marketing, and design.
  5. Time Management and Organisation  
Balancing research, reading, and writing deadlines effectively.
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## Study

### Study time

| Type          | Required                     |
|---------------|------------------------------|
| Seminars      | 10 sessions of 2 hours (13%) |
| Fieldwork     | 1 session of 2 hours (1%)    |
| Private study | 128 hours (85%)              |
| Total         | 150 hours                    |

### Private study description

Required and recommended reading for seminar presentations, research for written assessment and revision for examinations

### Costs

No further costs have been identified for this module.

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## Assessment

You do not need to pass all assessment components to pass the module.

### Assessment group D

| Assessment component                                                                                                         | Weighting | Study time | Eligible for self-certification |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|------------|---------------------------------|
| Assessed Essay<br>2000-word essay                                                                                            | 50%       |            | No                              |
| Reassessment component is the same                                                                                           |           |            |                                 |
| Assessment component                                                                                                         |           |            |                                 |
| Literature review<br>500-word literature review outlining the historiography of research on an individual artist or artistic | 10%       |            | No                              |

|                                                                  | Weighting | Study time | Eligible for self-certification |
|------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|------------|---------------------------------|
| movement of the student's choice.                                |           |            |                                 |
| Reassessment component is the same                               |           |            |                                 |
| Assessment component                                             |           |            |                                 |
| Centrally-timetabled examination (Online)<br>~Platforms - Moodle | 40%       |            | No                              |

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- Online examination: No Answerbook required

Reassessment component is the same

## Feedback on assessment

Essay feedback will be provided through a detailed feedback form outlining why the student received the mark they did and how they can improve. Each student will have the option of arranging a personal tutorial to discuss essay feedback in more depth with the lecturer.

[Past exam papers for HA2G7](#)

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## Availability

### Courses

This module is Option list A for:

- Year 2 of UHAA-V401 Undergraduate History of Art
- Year 2 of UHAA-V3R3 Undergraduate History of Art with Italian

This module is Option list B for:

- Year 2 of UHAA-V3R3 Undergraduate History of Art with Italian