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Russian Art of the Avant-Garde
LACMA exh. cat.

Bibliography

Alexandra Exter: *Marionettes*, exh. cat., Leonard Hutton Galleries, New York, 1975.

Art of the Theatre: Alexandra Exter, exh. cat., Lincoln Center, New York, 1974.

John E. Bowlit, "Aleksandra Exter: A Writable Amazon of the Russian Avant-Garde," *Art News*, New York, September 1974, pp. 41-43.

Yakov, *Alexandra Exter*, Galerie Jean Chauvelin, Paris, exh. cat., 1972.

Y. Yakitin, "Marsiane A. Exter," *Decorativnoe iskusstvo*, Moscow, no. 1, 1977, pp. 29-30.

John Claude Marcadé, "Alexandra Exter for the Search for the Elements of Light-Color," *Women Artists of the Russian Avant-Garde*, 1930, exh. cat. in German and English, Galerie Gmurzynska, Cologne, 1979, pp. 125ff.

■ A much traveled artist, Alexandra Exter provided an important link between the Russian and Western avant-garde. As a major contributor to such Russian pre-Revolutionary exhibitions as *Tramway V*, 1915, and *The Store*, 1916, Exter participated with Malevich and Tatlin in the creation of non-objective art. She was interested in Cubist theory and designed the cover for J. Aksenov's *Picasso and Environs (Pikasso i okrestnosti)*; this polemical treatise on art and criticism, of much interest to the Russian avant-garde, was published in Moscow in 1917. After the Revolution, Exter and her many students were active in popularizing Suprematist compositional principles in designs for agit-prop vehicles. In 1921 she helped pave the way for Constructivism by joining with Rodchenko, Popova, Stepanova, and A. Vesnin in the historic $5 \times 5 = 25$ exhibition. In the 1920s Exter directed her Productivist interest toward theater, cinema, and industrial design both in Russia and in Paris, where she settled in 1924.

Exter's paintings, textile designs, and marionettes were celebrated both in Russia and the West. Her fully realized non-objective *Composition* (c. 1921) establishes her control over an interlocking equilibrium of dynamic shapes positioned in flattened space. *Dress* (c. 1924, reconstructed 1974) exploits non-objective motifs in its geometricized pattern and stark black and eggshell white contrasts; its deceptively simple structure and shape are designed to be animated by the human figure moving through space. Most often cited for her pioneering set and costume designs for Alexandr Tairov's Kamerny Theater in Moscow, Exter was true to Constructivist ideals in emphasizing the use of industrial materials and the concrete construction of space. Her designs for the theater can be studied closely in I. Tugenhold's *Alexandra Exter*, published in Paris in 1922.

Exter's work for the revolutionary Russian cinema is particularly interesting. Yakov Protazanov's science fiction film *Aelita* was produced in Moscow in 1924 by the Mezhrabpon-Russ company. Based on a story by Alexei Tolstoi, the film concerns an engineer, a Red Army soldier, and a detective who are all transported to Mars. Against the background of a Martian revolutionary uprising, the engineer conducts a love affair with Aelita, the Queen of Mars. Realistic and satiric scenes of Moscow during the New Economic Plan period are contrasted with Martian hallucinations. The nature of the film medium enabled Exter to experiment with contrived spatial situations undergoing constant change. Into such fluid space Exter integrated bizarre costumes that emphasized geometric asymmetry, harsh black-and-white contrast, and innovative juxtaposition of such machine-cult media as aluminum, metal-foil, glass, and perspex. Although *Aelita* was not received well by the critics, it was immensely popular with the people. Exter's experiments in spatial construction were continued in Paris, as illustrated by the *Stage Design and Lighting Study for Scene 3, "Don Juan,"* done after Exter's emigration.

From a Statement by Alexandra Exter, 1921

■ The works on display are part of a general program of experiments in color which partly resolves the problems of color interrelationship, co-intensity, rhythmization, and the transition to color construction based on the laws of color itself.

Alexandra Exter, statement in $5 \times 5 = 25$ catalog, Moscow, 1921. Translated from the Russian by John E. Bowlit.

went to
Paris of the
Aelita

56



53.

Construction of Lines, 1923
Watercolor and gouache on paper
56 x 56 cm (22 x 22 in.)
Galerie Jean Chauvelin, Paris

54.

**Costume for Male for the Film
"Aelita," 1924**
Gouache on paper
53 x 34 cm. (20⁷/₈ x 13³/₈ in.)
Mississippi Museum of Art,
Jackson. The Lobanov Collection

55.

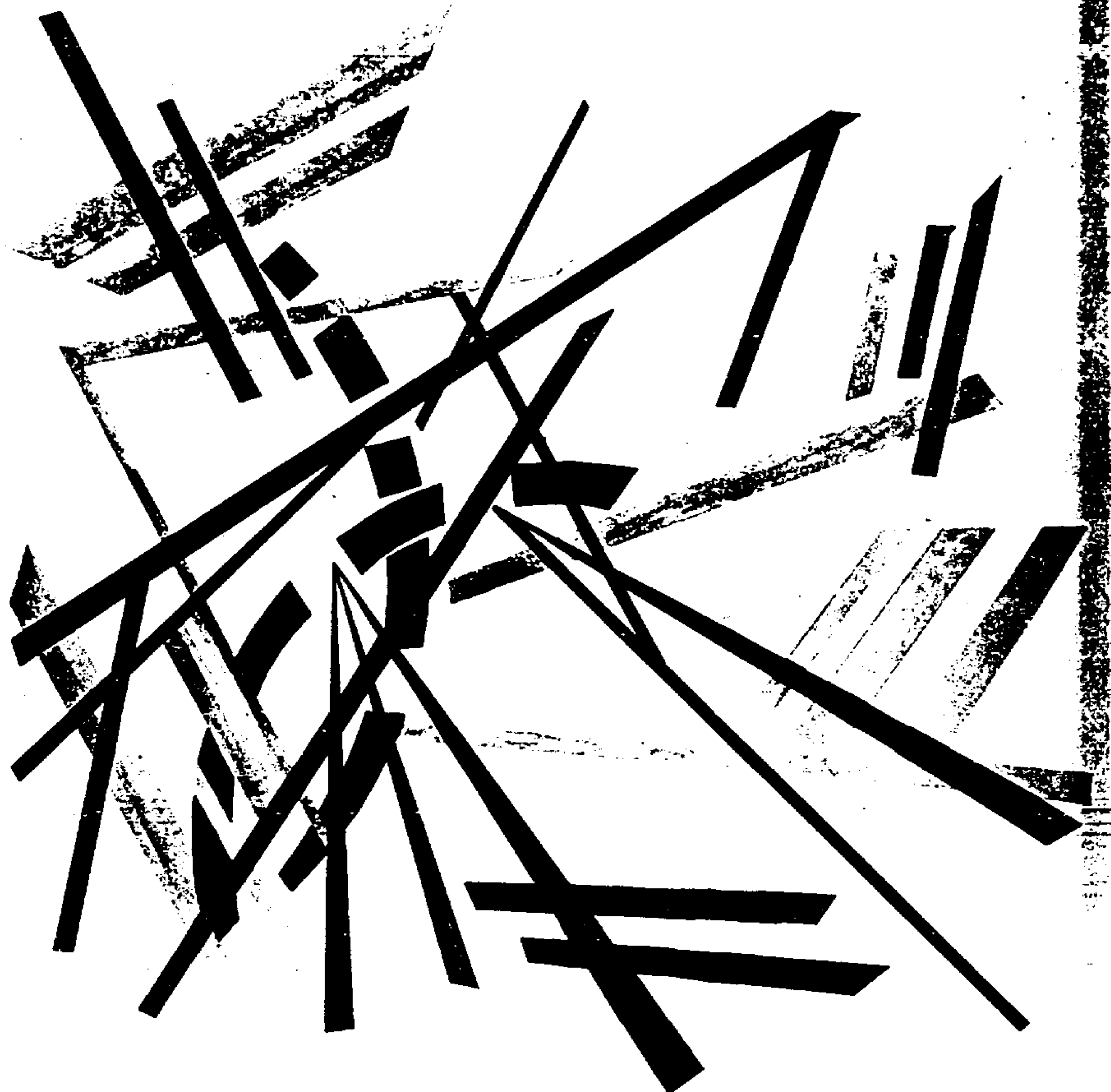
**Costume for Female for the Film
"Aelita," 1924**
Gouache on paper
47.6 x 17.8 (18³/₄ x 7 in.)
Mississippi Museum of Art,
Jackson. The Lobanov Collection

56.

**Costume Design for the Queen
of the Martians for the Film
"Aelita," 1924**
Ink and gouache on paper
50.2 x 42.5 cm. (19³/₄ x 16³/₄ in.)
Mississippi Museum of Art,
Jackson. The Lobanov Collection

57.

Dress, c. 1924
Reconstruction 1979, models
realized by van Laack according to
original artist's sketches
Flannel serge; size 8/10
Collection van Laack Company,
West Germany



53

58.

**Stage Design and Lighting Study
for Scene 3, "Don Juan," 1926**
Gouache on paper
67.3 x 49.5 cm. (26¹/₂ x 19¹/₂ in.)
Mississippi Museum of Art,
Jackson. The Lobanov Collection