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**MAJOR ART INSTITUTE EXHIBITION SHOWCASES REVOLUTIONARY MOMENT IN
20TH-CENTURY GRAPHIC AND INDUSTRIAL DESIGN**

***Avant-Garde Art in Everyday Life* Features Artists and Designers**

Heartfield, Klutis, Lissitzky, Sutnar, Teige, and Zwart Bringing “Art into Life”

Exhibition on View June 11–October 9, 2011

Beginning around 1910, a group of vanguard artists working in Europe advanced the radical idea that art had a mandate to transform daily life, from silverware to postage stamps to buildings. This theory would eventually take hold in the wider world, where it merged enthusiastically with the demands of the industrial marketplace, the nascent mass media, and urban popular culture. This vibrant and critically important moment in east-central European modernism is comprehensively explored in *Avant-Garde Art in Everyday Life*—a major exhibition on view at the Art Institute of Chicago from **June 11 through October 9, 2011**, in the **Modern Wing’s Abbott Galleries (G 182–184)**. Focusing on six highly influential international artists—**John Heartfield, Gustav Klutis, El Lissitzky,**

Ladislav Sutnar, Karel Teige, and Piet Zwart—this exhibition features nearly 300 works from a landmark acquisition, including photography, photomontage, book and poster design, and household objects such as rare examples of porcelain and glassware. *Avant-Garde Art in Everyday Life* is the first significant exhibition at the Art Institute to address any aspect of art east of Germany during the interwar decades.



The six artists featured in this exhibition shared a fervent belief that they could help restructure society by redesigning common or utilitarian items. Working in the 1920s and 1930s, specifically in central and eastern Europe, they were fully informed about the history of art and the state of the world around them, and they formed networks to circulate ideas for changing that world through creative interventions of all kinds in everyday life. Books, prints, posters, table settings, postage



stamps, illustrated magazines, clothing, exhibition installations, building proposals—these artists energetically and zealously reached into every conceivable creative domain. They traded ideas through the mail, sharing published journal essays and original works in photography and graphic design. Across the boundaries of media, disciplines, and nationalities, these avant-garde artists presciently set the stage for today's modern communications and advertising industries.

Piet Zwart (Dutch, 1885–1977) and **Ladislav Sutnar** (Czech, later American, 1897–1976) both helped invent the position of industrial designer, creating brand identities for

companies by applying principles of standardization, serial production, and eye-catching clarity to advertising and domestic products. Zwart brought his minimalist aesthetic vision to ubiquitous items like biscuit boxes and postage stamps, while his compatriot Sutnar brought modernist "good design" to tableware, clothing, and children's toys. **Karel Teige** (1900–1951), the leader of the Czech avant-garde, and the immensely influential Russian artist **Lazar (El) Lissitzky** (1890–1941) developed the language of Constructivism in typography, architecture, exhibition designs, and critical essays. Teige produced brilliant book and journal designs while Lissitzky created some of the most exciting poster and exhibition designs of the 1920s and 1930s in Germany and Russia. **John Heartfield** (1891–1968), a native German who took an English name, and Latvian-born **Gustav Klutsis** (1895–1938), who worked in Soviet Russia, mastered the persuasive rhetoric of word-image combinations in photomontage, creating posters and magazines that were seen by tens of thousands at the time. Heartfield worked exclusively in photomontage to design book covers, journals, and agitational posters for the Communist cause; Klutsis also pioneered using photomontage for political purposes.

The objects featured in *Avant-Garde Art in Everyday Life* come almost entirely from a recent major acquisition by the Art Institute: the Robert and June Leibowits Collection. This acquisition is the largest undertaking by the Department of Photography in 12 years and the first acquisition ever to be shared by multiple curatorial departments in the museum (the departments of Prints and Drawings, Architecture and Design, and Photography) and the Ryerson and Burnham Libraries. The Art Institute now has the second largest public holding in the United States of original issues of *Arbeiter Illustrierte Zeitung* (1927–1936), the leftist propaganda weekly with photomontage designs by John Heartfield, and the greatest collection of Russian Futurist books outside of New York and Los Angeles. With this acquisition the museum has also significantly strengthened its collection of works of Soviet, Czech, Dutch, and German Constructivism.

A beautifully designed 160-page exhibition catalogue accompanies *Avant-Garde Art in Everyday Life*. Edited by Matthew S. Witkovsky, curator of the exhibition and chair of the Department of Photography at the Art Institute, the book contains essays written by a team of specialists—Jared Ash, Maria Gough, Jindrich Toman, Nancy J. Troy, and Andrés Mario Zervigón—on these six artists and their attraction to the dynamic realm of “everyday life.” The catalogue is available for purchase in the Art Institute’s Museum Shop for \$50.

Avant-Garde Art in Everyday Life is organized by the Art Institute of Chicago and curated by Matthew S. Witkovsky, curator and chair of the Department of Photography. Major funding is provided by Robert and June Leibowits. Generous support is provided by the Exhibitions Trust: Goldman Sachs, Kenneth and Anne Griffin, Thomas and Margot Pritzker, the Earl and Brenda Shapiro Foundation, Donna and Howard Stone, Mr. and Mrs. Paul Sullivan, and an anonymous donor.

The Art Institute of Chicago Hosts Snap: the Fourth Photography Benefit Gala 9/22/11

The Art Institute of Chicago's Photography Department will host one of the most anticipated events of the year, **Snap**, in celebration of the major exhibition, *Avant-Garde Art in Everyday Life*, on **September 22, 2011**. The event this year, co-chaired by **Brenda Shapiro** and **Ikram and Josh Goldman**, will raise funds for the Photography Gala Endowment for future acquisitions. The evening's sponsors are Harris Bank and Christie's. For tickets or more information, please visit www.artic.edu/snap, call (312) 857-7640, or e-mail snapgala@artic.edu.

IMAGES:

Gustav Klutssis, *Javelin* from a series of nine postcards commemorating the *Spartakiada [All-Union Olympiad]*, 1928. Letterpress. 14.8 x 10.3 cm. The Art Institute of Chicago, Frederick W. Renshaw Acquisition Fund. © 2011 Estate of Gustav Klutssis / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

Piet Zwart, *American Film Art (Ameri kaansche Film-kunst)*, cover for C. J. Graadt van Roggen, editor, *Film: Serie monografieën over filmkunst (Film: A Series of Monographs on the Art of Film)*, Rotterdam, 1931. Letterpress, 22 x 17.7 cm. The Art Institute of Chicago, Frederick W. Renshaw Acquisition Fund. © 2011 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / c/o Pictoright Amsterdam.

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MUSEUM HOURS

10:30 am–5:00 pm Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday

10:30 am–8:00 pm Thursday

10:30 am–5:00 pm Saturday, Sunday

TARGET FREE THURSDAY EVENINGS AFTER 5:00 pm through May 26

FREE FIRST AND SECOND WEDNESDAYS OF EACH MONTH BEGIN JUNE 1, 2011

Closed Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Day, and New Year's Day.

ADMISSION

Adults \$18.00 Includes all special exhibitions

Children 14 and over, students, and seniors \$12.00 Includes all special exhibitions

Chicago residents receive a \$2.00 discount with proof of residency

Children under 14 always free

Members always free

Free Evenings are free to all. City of Chicago residents with Chicago Public Library cards can borrow a "Museum Passport" card from any library branch for free general admission to the nine members of Museums in the Park, including the Art Institute of Chicago.