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**ART INSTITUTE ANNOUNCES MAJOR ACQUISITION OF SEMINAL MALEVICH PAINTING**

***Painterly Realism of a Football Player—Color Masses in the 4<sup>th</sup> Dimension***

**Pioneering Work of Abstraction**

**Suprematist Masterpiece Fills Major Lacuna in Modern Art Holdings**

The Art Institute of Chicago announces one of the most significant acquisitions in its history: **Kazimir Malevich's *Painterly Realism of a Football Player—Color Masses in the 4<sup>th</sup> Dimension*** (1915). Joining such works as Georges Seurat's *A Sunday on La Grande Jatte—1884*, Edward Hopper's *Nighthawks*, El Greco's *Assumption of the Virgin*, Gustave Caillebotte's *Paris Street; Rainy Day*, and Henri Matisse's *Bathers by a River*, Malevich's masterpiece is the first work of Russian Suprematism to enter the museum's collection and bridges one of the few gaps in the museum's extremely strong holdings of European modern art. With this acquisition, the Art Institute becomes only the second public institution in the United States to feature a Suprematist painting by Malevich in its collection. The acquisition was spearheaded at the Art Institute by Douglas Druick, Chair and Searle Curator of the Department of Medieval through Modern European Painting and Sculpture, and Stephanie D'Alessandro, Gary C. and Frances Comer Curator of Modern Art in the same department.



“It is truly an honor to lead an institution at a time when a work of art such as Malevich's *Painterly Realism of a Football Player* becomes available,” said James Cuno, President and Eloise W. Martin Director of the Art Institute of Chicago. “The chances to add a work of such rarity and

quality to a collection are few and far between, and we are grateful that our trustees shared with us the sense that this opportunity should not be missed. We welcome the painting to Chicago to enrich the experience for our visitors today but also for our visitors for years to come.”

“The Art Institute’s collection is rich in extraordinary works that illustrate the evolution of modern art in Europe—from Manet to Magritte,” said Druick, “but we’ve lacked an example of the great contributions of Russian abstraction.” D’Alessandro added, “The acquisition of Malevich’s *Painterly Realism of a Football Player*, a work not only of exceptional historical importance but also in extremely good condition, represents a dramatic and collection-changing opportunity for the museum.”

The work was offered by the heirs of Kazimir Malevich and was acquired through Gagosian Gallery. Larry Gagosian, speaking on behalf of the heirs of Malevich, stated: “The heirs are extremely pleased that this important painting by their renowned ancestor has been acquired by one of the finest museums in the United States.”

There are many pioneers of abstraction, but Malevich (1879–1935) is one of the most significant and rigorous, doing the most to push art to non-objective abstraction through his Suprematist movement. Having worked previously in a style related to cubism and futurism, it was not until 1915, the year of *Painterly Realism of a Football Player*, that Malevich brought his abstraction to its fully realized form. *Painterly Realism of a Football Player* was one of a group of revolutionary works that Malevich created in secrecy for one of the most seminal exhibitions of the modern moment, *0.10 (Zero–Ten): The Last Futurist Exhibition of Painting* in Moscow in 1915. For that exhibition, Malevich created paintings that completely eradicated all references to the recognizable world and focused instead on the inherent relationships of geometric shapes of various colors that seem to float against their white backgrounds.

Considered at the time a pure and fundamental embodiment of painting itself (the “zero” in the *Zero–Ten* exhibition), *Painterly Realism of a Football Player* offered a radical formal vocabulary for art. Influenced greatly by developments in the understanding of space-time physics and the notion of the fourth dimension, Malevich referenced the natural world in his title (the football player) but also dispelled it on the canvas to present bold lines and planes freed from the weight of the third dimension. Malevich later even gave up the last vestige of the art of representation by disposing with traditional ideas of the “top” and “bottom” in his canvases; historical

documentation reveals that in the four instances that the artist showed *Painterly Realism of a Football Player* during his lifetime, it was shown in two different orientations.

A critical historical photograph of the exhibition documents 21 paintings in *Zero–Ten*. Of these, 9 were lost or destroyed during the decades of political and cultural oppression of the former Soviet Union; of the 12 that remain, most can be found today in such institutions as The Museum of Modern Art in New York, the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, the Musée national d'art moderne in Paris, and the State Russian Museum in Saint Petersburg. Thus the opportunity to acquire a painting by Malevich from this year, when his mystical ideas about pure abstraction found their first and fullest realization, is extremely rare and arguably a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. The acquisition of *Painterly Realism of a Football Player* will stand as one of the most significant additions ever to the museum's already strong permanent collection of European modern art.

IMAGE: Kazimir Malevich, *Painterly Realism of a Football Player—Color Masses in the 4th Dimension* (1915). Oil on canvas. 1327-5/8 x 17-5/16 in. (70.2 x 44.1 cm). Through prior gift of Charles H. and Mary F. S. Worcester Collection, Art Institute of Chicago Acquisition Funds, 2011.1.

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