

Alexander Rodchenko

Black on Black

In spite of their better knowledge and in disregard of the well-known comparative works at the MoMA New York and the State Russian Museum St. Petersburg, the Museum Ludwig accuses the grandson of Alexander Rodchenko of having added in 1978 the artists stenciled signature on the back of the iconic 1918 “Black on Black” painting.

Museum Ludwig, Cologne
since 1985



Black on Black, no. 78, 1918

MoMA, New York
since 1936



Black on Black, no. 80, 1918

State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg
since 1926



Black on Black, no. 81, 1918

“If, on the other hand, a third party had affixed said inscription to the work, then this third party would have committed forgery of documents under German criminal law by creating a counterfeit legal document”

(“Russian Avantgarde in Museum Ludwig - Art Forgery and the Law,” Friederike Gräfin von Brühl and Ruth Lecher, page 200)

Based on this legal definition in their own publication, Museum Ludwig seems to accuse Rodchenko’s grandson of falsifying a document. This is a grave accusation indeed. Having worked as a professor of art history his entire life, he donated 500 works of his Rodchenko collection to the Pushkin Museum.

This is slanderous and simply untrue, as can be seen from the reverse of the two paintings in the collection of the MoMA (since 1936 in their possession) and the State Russian Museum (since 1926 in their collection).

It is questionable how the grandson, who was born in 1954, could have signed those works. To top it off, the Museum Ludwig mistakes the numbers on the back, which are part of the artist’s own numbering, as the year the grandson supposedly signed those works.

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AH CONTEXT: FAKTURA AND RIVALRY WITH KAZIMIR MALEVICH

ML 01419

"This exhibition is a contest between Anti and Malevich, the rest are rubbish. Malevich has hung five white canvases, Anti black ones. . . . The faktura in Anti's 'Blacks' is unusual. You really had to do something unusual for a work painted completely in black to become a wonderful, highly artistic work. . . . In the 'black' works, nothing but painting exists. Therefore, their faktura gains an extraordinary presence. . . . The lustrous, matt, dull, uneven, smooth parts of the surface create an unusually powerful composition."

– Varvara Stepanova, artist and wife

"The works from the black period mark the beginning of a new existence of form in space, and of a new space. . . . Therefore, it seems to me that Malevich wasn't aware of what the existence of form should be, and he simply jumped into painting things white without destroying the real existence of the surface plane."

– Excerpt from the Rodchenko's diary

● AT THE PAINTING'S REVERSE

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Alexander Lawrentjew, grandson of Alexandr Rodtschenko, put the artist's name in Cyrillic on the back side of the painting at the estate in 1978. He used in the bold typography that Rodchenko created for magazines like LEF (Front of the Arts) in the 1920s.

AH STYLE

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"Color is no longer an illustrative medium here but a substance whose material qualities are emphasized. Nonrepresentational forms emerge on the picture plane solely through the differentiation between smooth and uneven, matte and glossy areas."

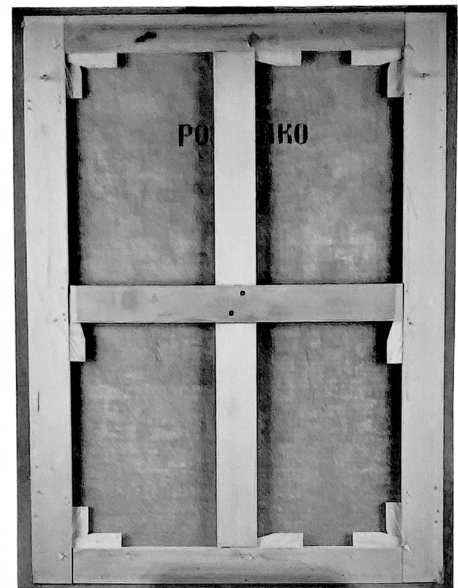
– Dorothee Böhm, Art Historian

AT PAINTING ANALYSIS

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Recent examinations of painting technique in works from the *Black Paintings* series revealed how Rodchenko accomplished their surface effect and the material experiments he used to achieve it. Evidence of bitumen/asphalt was found in these works.

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RÜCKSEITE

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Alexander Lawrentjew, Enkel von Alexander Rodtschenko, hat das Gemälde aus dem Nachlass 1978 auf der Rückseite mit dem Namen des Künstlers in kyrillisch bezeichnet. Für die Schablone nutzte er die kraftvolle Typographie, die Rodtschenko für Magazine wie LEF (Front of the Arts) in den 1920er Jahre entwickelte.

Page from the press kit and brochure of Museum Ludwig, 8.10.2020

Label in the exhibition "Russian Avant-Garde at the Museum Ludwig," Cologne 2020