



SOVIET TEXTILES

DESIGNING THE MODERN UTOPIA



SOVIET TEXTILES DESIGNING THE MODERN UTOPIA

Selected from the Lloyd Cotsen Collection

PAMELA JILL KACHURIN

MFA PUBLICATIONS
a division of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston



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All works except for the comparative figure illustrations are from the Lloyd Cotsen Collection.

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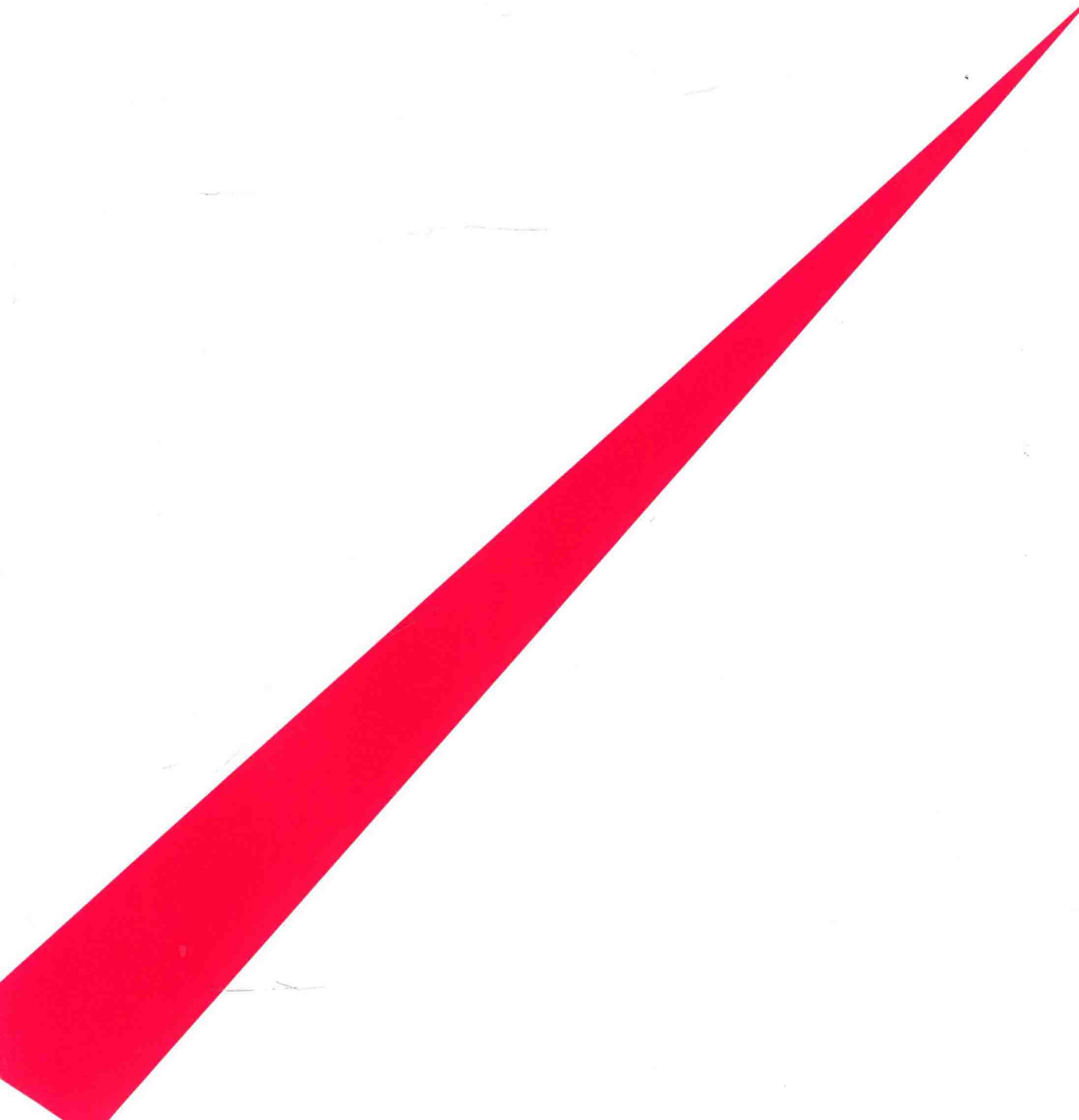
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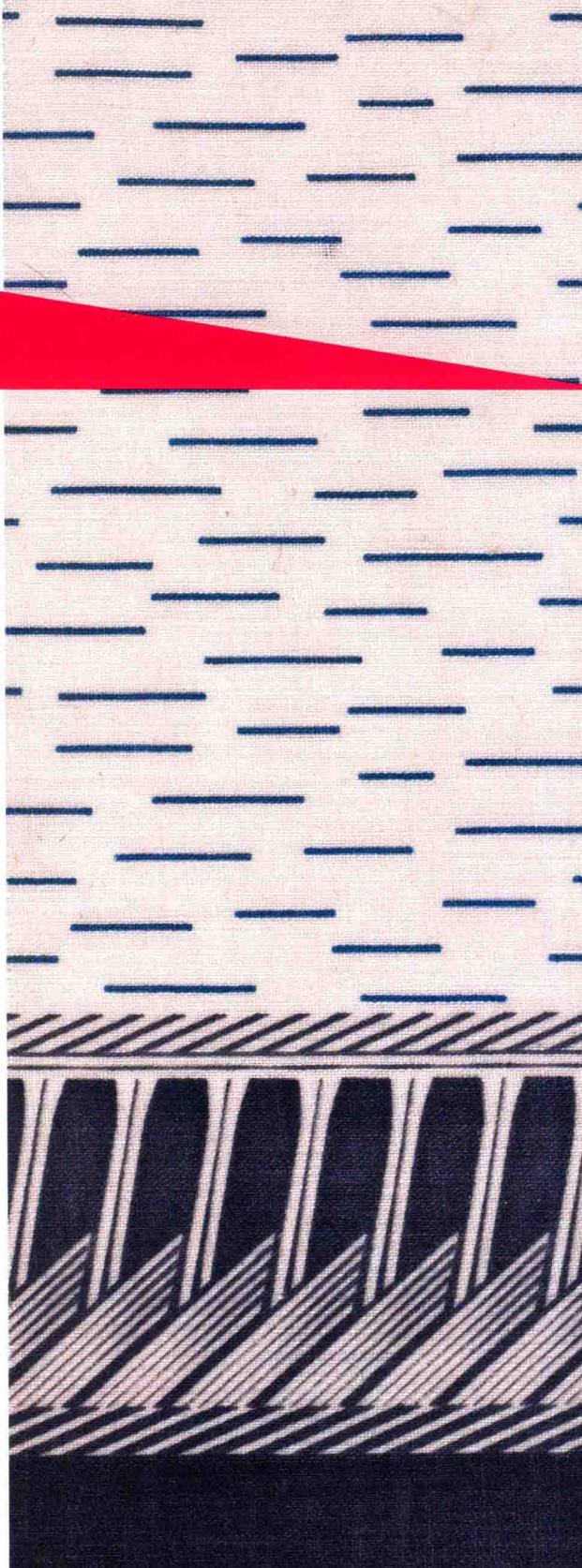
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DIRECTOR'S FOREWORD

It is with great thanks to Lloyd Cotsen that we present his collection of Soviet textiles and drawings in this book and in the exhibition it accompanies. Mr. Cotsen has long been an avid collector of folk art and textiles, and he is deeply committed to sharing his treasures with a broad public. He is particularly interested in art that is intimately connected to people—to our desire to change and shape human life through the power of art and design. The works in this collection testify to his recognition of that desire.

Dating from the early years of the Soviet Union (specifically between 1927 and 1933), these textiles and drawings represent a period when the new Communist leadership was at-

tempting to convert the predominantly agricultural nation into a modern, mechanized utopia. Some artists believed that mass-produced fabrics depicting such symbols of modernity as airplanes and electrical pylons could mold the outlook and actions of the masses to align with the modern Soviet ideal. The objects illustrated here comprise only a small portion of Mr. Cotsen's collection of Soviet-era textiles, but they represent the prevalent motifs that featured in this intriguing and short-lived experiment.

I am grateful to Mr. Cotsen, his curators Mary Hunt Kahlenberg and Lyssa Stapleton, and the rest of his curatorial staff for sharing his collection with us and making this exhibition and publication possible. I also extend my gratitude to Pamela Kachurin, author of the essay and guest curator of the exhibition, whose expertise in Soviet history has brought these works into focus for an English-speaking audience, and to Alexandra Bennett Huff, Curatorial Planning and Project Manager, for so ably overseeing the project. Finally, I thank Pamela Parmal, David and Roberta Logie Curator of

Textile and Fashion Arts, and her staff here at the MFA for their ongoing creative promotion of the significant and fascinating ways that textiles have been and continue to be an integral part of our artistic heritage.

Malcolm Rogers
Ann and Graham Gund Director
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston



DESIGNING THE MODERN UTOPIA

PAMELA JILL KACHURIN

The 1920s and 1930s were a period of rapid industrialization, collectivization, and cultural revolution in the nascent Soviet Union. In March 1917, succumbing to political pressures, Tsar Nicholas II had abdicated the Russian throne and a provisional government had been installed. Meanwhile, the Bolshevik Party, led by Vladimir Ulianov (who would change his last name to Lenin), had gained popular support with its platform of ending Russian involvement in World War I and promising bread and land to the impoverished citizens of Russia. In October 1917, in a bloodless coup d'état, the Bolsheviks took control of the central government functions, and Lenin became the leader of the new Soviet Russia. The civil war

that ensued from 1918 to 1920 ended with Bolshevik victory and the subsequent founding in 1922 of the Soviet Union, an officially socialist state under the Communist Party.

Every aspect of public and private life was touched by the Bolsheviks' campaign to transform the new Soviet Union from a backward, agrarian country into a modern, industrialized state. Central to this effort was the overthrowing of Russia's exploitative capitalists, with the hope that dismantling the bourgeoisie as a class and handing over control of enterprise to the workers would end the dramatic disparities that characterized the Russian economy. The Communist leadership was highly dependent on visual media to communicate these tenets to the mostly illiterate Russian population. During the civil war, it charged printing presses with the task of designing visually emphatic broadsides, such as Vladimir Kozlinsky's "Holiday finery: Then and now" poster, that could be easily understood and quickly digested.

As the textiles and drawings in this book demonstrate, even textile design was harnessed