

Let's begin with a square; not any square, but a small, black square. No, a black rectangle.

Appearing inside this perfect square the figures of musical notes, forming eventually a music score. It is an invisible score, one of unfinished streaks of black on black, with brush strokes so thick it resembles some kind of trembling, living organism breathing in the depths of blackness.

It is December 1915, St. Petersburg (Petrograd).

A group of artists, headed by Kazimir Malevich show works as part of the *0.10 Last Exhibition of Futurist Painting*. Amongst thirty-five abstract paintings, a black square on a white background. It was hung across the corner of the room in an unusually high position. In bold statements, manifesto, accompanied manifesto of *Suprematism* and was upheld by the magic black square.

A work of art that negates art, in all its totality and its sheer boldness. In his manifesto, the 'Non-objective world' Malevich writes "in the year 1913, trying desperately to free art from the dead weight of the real world, I took refuge in the form of the square." (Tate). This magical square becomes translated into further forms, such as a triangle, a rectangle, free floating on white backgrounds. The black square, appeared just on the brink of the Russian Revolution. The black square held the vision and utopian ideal of breaking free from this world. It had begun its life earlier in 1913 as part of a stage set for the opera 'Victory of the Sun.' It, too, had roots in music. The libretto was based on Kruchenykh's zaum: a new language of sounds that had no meaning.

Nocturnes were solo piano pieces, written by the composer of Irish origin, John Field. He was a piano salesman, touring the major European capitals with his mentor, Muzio Clementi. In 1802, they arrive in St. Petersburg to sell more pianos. Field decides to stay on and becomes a highly sought-after piano teacher and composer. Living between St. Petersburg and Moscow, he writes several of his Nocturnes.

Isn't it sometimes bizarre when we think of the worlds of art and music entwined, in between black symbols and squares, in free floating abstract shapes that can be read as notes.

And the owl? What mystical cosmos does he belong to? .

I have seen these wanderers, peasants coming into town from the villages to perform miracles. Hovering in the air, sat with their legs crossed over each other. Hovering in between, like a cross or a religious artwork, the black square keeps an eye on them and me

Note that the first announcement of *Suprematism* was assigned as the 'last futurist exhibition.' The next step was to tackle absolute black space by conquering the moon. A way had to be found to escape. A pure black hole awaited a route to escapism.

Is black even considered a colour?

Writer and philosopher Eugene Thacker writes "Black is the colour of ink, oil, crows, mourning and outer space." It was only recently, in April 2019, that the MIT scientific telescopic lens returned the first image of a black hole from outer space. "Black is not considered to be a colour in the conventional sense of the term. Black objects are those that do not reflect light in the visible spectrum; thus, colour theory refers to black as 'non-chromatic' or 'achromatic.'" (Thacker, E., 2013) Indeed, there is life in black.

Even if the paint is cracked in parts, allowing the white to seep through. Oxana Timofeeva in her article *Ultra black; brief notes towards a materialist theory of oil* (Timofeeva, O, 2017), recalls her memories of growing up in Sugrut, in northwest Siberia that was known for its oil industry. The oil of my childhood, she writes, was a kind of living dead, an inhuman afterlife it possessed reminiscent of ancestral life of pre-existing dinosaurs. The colour of oil is ultra-black and nothing can be compared to it. Indeed, anyone who has been in the presence of oil can evoke memories of complete and utter blackness, a smooth, yet disquieting creature of a material. If you search for a subject of cosmic revolution, go preach to the oil, she writes.

Yet a way had to be found to escape. From the manipulations of the black square, into a rectangle, a triangle, shapes, geometrical abstractions to the blackness of the cosmos beyond and in their own homes. Because after all, the world is a much better place when it is looked at from above.

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Pitch black notes and black piano and for company we had a black cat with one eye missing. He listened to Kate playing the Nocturnes on the piano. The piano was out of tune, but later on a piano tuner was called upon, and the strings of the interior were pulled tightly to make it all sound better. There was a piece missing: I never made it Moscow. Despite being around the corner from the Moscow train station, with trains running regularly, it was one thing that I regret.

In order to escape his by now oppressive Moscow life, Costakis sold all of his works of his collection to the Greek state. This was his passport and the story of how a whole collection of Russian avant-garde art escaped, together with the black square, and found a new home in Greece. And so, all the Russian avant-gardes, Lubova, Rodchenko, Malevich, all came to live permanently in my home town of Thessaloniki.

In September 2017, in light of many commemorations of the 100 years from the Bolshevik revolution, Boris Groys curated the exhibition "Art Without Death: conversations on Russian Cosmism" at the Haus der Kulturen der Welt. The exhibition delved into Russian Cosmism, the philosophical, scientific and artistic concepts and ideas. Anton Vidokles three-part film, "Immortality for all!" was screened, exploring the writings and legacy of the founder of cosmism, Nikolai Fedorov.

The exhibition showcased a large number of works from the George Costakis Collection, now housed at the Greek State Museum of Modern Art, in Thessaloniki.

It was only after my return from Russia, St. Petersburg, that I visited the collection and saw the *black square*, which had now become a black rectangle oil on canvas.

And lastly, it became its own funeral, in a tiny, 26,5x18,5cm sketch or caricature. The comical figures holding the stretcher and transporting the little black square to its resting place resemble a wafer-thin glistening of monochrome. Why would the little black square lay down in this fashion?

Let's finish with a square, turned into a rectangle. Take out a corner from the rectangle and transform the arch into becoming the top of the black reflective surface of the piano; or the notes glistening against the white of the page.

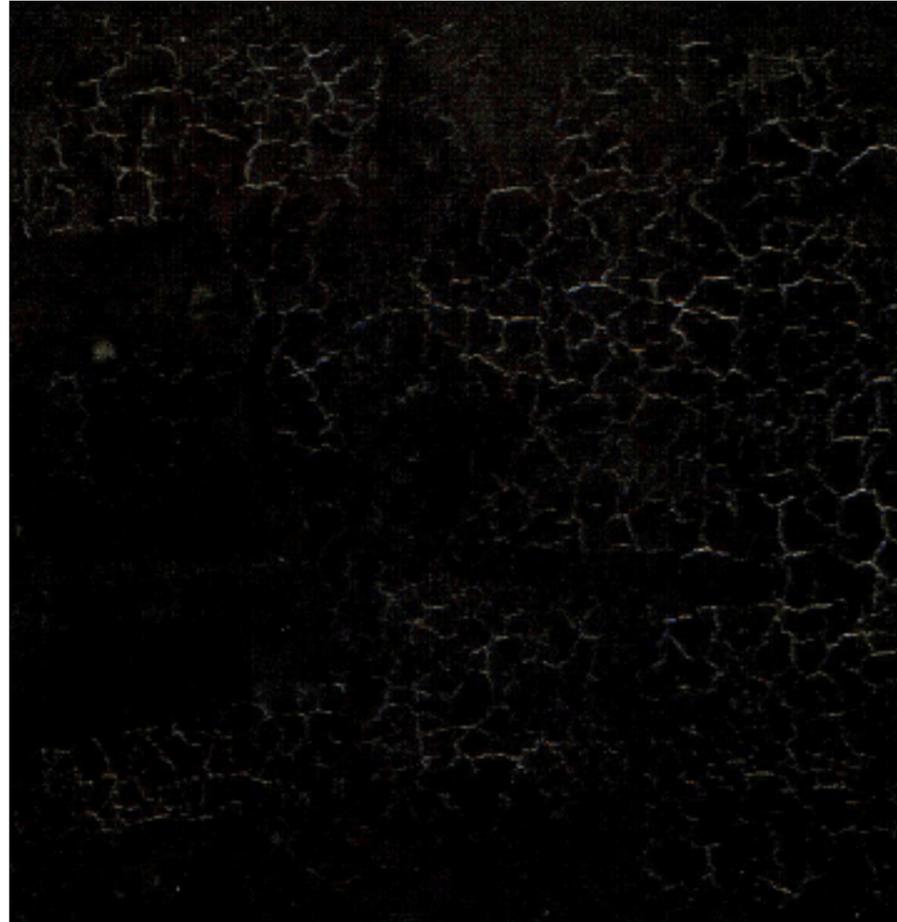
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Nocturne



An experimental film
& writing
based on a residency at
St. Petersburg, Russia

June 2018-May 2019



Kazimir Malevich, Black Square, 1915, Oil on canvas

*“For the student of the Russian Revolution, time is literally out of joint”
China Mieville, (2017) October*

Stella Baraklianou film and words
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