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Revolution: New Art for a New World (2016)

Documentary, 85 min.
Directed by MARGY KINMONTH.
Written by MARGY KINMONTH.
Cast: Daisy Bevan, Sean Cronin, Alex Enmarch, James Fleet, Ernest Gromov, Tom Hollander, Matthew Macfadyen, Tom Rose, Eleanor Tomlison.
United Kingdom and Russia: Foxtrot Films
Language: English.

Director Margy Kinmonth's latest film is the pinnacle of her exploration of the secrets of Russian art spanning over more than three decades. *Revolution: New Art for a New World* is a spectacular documentary made to commemorate the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 and to demonstrate the crucial importance of art for the creation of the new regime. With the remarkable breadth and depth of its scope, the film creates an exhilarating depiction of one of modern history's most tumultuous periods and immerses its viewers into the inseparable mixture of art and politics that shaped humanity's future for decades to come.

Revolution: New Art for a New World is Margy Kinmonth's fourth film about Russia, following *Nutcracker Story* (2008), *Mariinsky Theatre* (2008), and the BAFTA nominated *Hermitage Revealed* (2014), a declaration of love to Russia's most famous museum. After first visiting Russia in 1981, Kinmonth found the country to be an infinite source of inspiration, and managed to create lasting connections there, which proved invaluable for the creation of *Revolution*. Gaining exclusive access to the vast collections of the State Tretyakov Gallery, the State Russian Museum and the State Hermitage Museum, Kinmonth shows on the widescreen both works by celebrated artists, such as Marc Chagall, Wassily Kandinsky and Kazimir Malevich, and hidden gems by lesser-known avant-garde masters: Gustav Klutsis, Aleksandr Rodchenko, Varvara Stepanova, and Liubov Popova.

The inspiration for the film came from Sergei Eisenstein's classic depiction of the revolution, *October* (1928), which Kinmonth later found out to be largely exaggerated for propaganda purposes. Exactly this lack of differentiation between art and politics became the film's main area of interest. What made a group of brilliant artists subjugate their art to political purposes, and why was that process abruptly brought to an end with Stalin's rise to power?

The film attempts to answer these questions through footage from the fascinating collections of Russia's largest galleries, talks with prominent art and history experts and

interviews with the descendants of avant-garde artists, who tell the stories of their remarkable predecessors and bring a note of empathy and humanism to the otherwise mostly ideological history of the Revolution. Kinmonth adds original news footage from the period depicting momentous events such as the demolition of the emblematic Moscow cathedral Christ the Savior. Masterfully interwoven with the actual footage, these pieces of history depict the actual scale of the events of the Revolution, and make them come to life in front of our eyes. The final touch to this visual feast is the use of footage recreating the biomechanics method of actor training, developed during this period by Vsevolod Meyerhold, as well as excerpts from Eisenstein's *October* and Dziga Vertov's *A Man with a Movie Camera* (1929). The variety of art forms depicted and the masterful cinematic representation demonstrate the full extent of the avant-garde tradition and its best examples.

From Kinmonth's extensive exploration we learn that Lenin believed 'art [was] the most powerful means of political propaganda for the triumph of the socialist cause', and he put this belief into use by working hand in hand with the avant-garde artists to build a new, radically different world. Therefore, many artists played a crucial role in the execution of the Revolution and, through their works, became its strongest voice. A sense of overwhelming creative potential and a spirit of renewal best characterise the period, and Kinmonth tries to recreate those by using excerpts from the artists' writings, showing the artworks themselves and even recreating an influential debate between the masters of avant-garde about the future of art and, not surprisingly, the future of the country. One particular piece of art becomes the focus of critical debate in the film - Malevich's *Black Square:* a painting so controversial that even its current multimillion value cannot prevent some critics from claiming that it is absurd. Being an emanation of Malevich's personal artistic movement, Suprematism, it comes as a perfect illustration of the artist's claim that '[he] has transformed [himself] in the zero of form and dragged [himself] out of the rubbish-filled pool of Academic art.'

This desire to break from tradition and build a new world not out of the remains of the old but on its place seems to unite the avant-garde artists and politicians of the time, who all felt the burden of building the new tomorrow. Devoting art to political purposes therefore did not seem a compromise but a form of liberation, allowing artists to actively participate in society, just as everyone else. Unfortunately, this period of artistic emancipation came to an end only fifteen years later when Stalin's regime put an end to artistic liberty and replaced avant-garde art with Socialist Realism, a style less

dangerous and much easier to control.

With *Revolution: New Art for a New World* Margy Kinmonth provides both the art lover and the regular moviegoer with an interest in history, with a fascinating journey through the world of Russian avant-garde following the 1917 Revolution. Giving ample background information about the depicted artworks and getting in contact with the living relatives of the artists, all wonderfully accompanied by Shostakovich's original score, Kinmonth provides a thrilling cinematic experience and a masterfully crafted piece of film.

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