

properly entitled his inquiry “The Cow and the Violin: Toward a History of Russian Dada.”⁵⁴

During the era of Fevralism, Malevich created not only proto-Dadaist masterpieces that blazed the way for future manipulations with ready-made images of mass culture, but also devised unique word-images and the conceptualist “Village,” in which a word is the object of art. However, in the context of his further artistic biography, Fevralism was a transient phenomenon. Nonetheless, on this transient path Malevich produced several discoveries of the first rank that subsequently manifested themselves in the trends and movements of twentieth-century world art, although their creators, as a rule, had no inkling of their Russian predecessor. This only adds to the value of Malevich’s accomplishments. Very soon after, in May 1916, he would write to Alexandre Benois, a denigrator of innovative art, “I did not obey my fathers and I do not resemble them. I too am a stage”—a stage in the artistic mastery of the world edifice.

In fact, in historical perspective, his art—to use his own metaphor—turned out to be not a stage but a genuine threshold.

During the Fevralist era, Malevich underwent a reorientation in his quest from plasticity to conceptual speculation to which everything on earth was subject: Fevralism erased the boundaries of what was customarily designated by the word “art.”

This reconstruction of Fevralism has had as its goal, apart from reviving an unknown avant-garde “ism,” that of demonstrating the long, hard, and organic maturation of Malevich’s main discovery. With Fevralism restored, the picture of geometric abstraction’s birth acquires the chronological dynamic that its creator eliminated by shifting its dates in the name of asserting precedence.

Malevich’s first personal “ism” cleared the way for his chief “ism.”

The Rise of Suprematism

May 1915

Today we know that Malevich the conceptualist convincingly backdated his works to construct a “correct” artistic biography for himself. With regard to Suprematism, he changed not only dates but the very sequence of events. To this day, most scholars subscribe to Malevich’s picture of Suprematism’s birth.

In spring 1915, Matiushin was getting ready to republish *Victory Over the Sun* (which had first appeared in print at the time of the performances), and for