

## The First Verbovka Exhibition

*Suprematism's Debut: November 6, 1915, Moscow*

All these processes—the end of Fevralism, the arrival at mature Suprematism, and the initial comprehension of its originality by Malevich himself—took place over the course of 1915. Beginning in September of that momentous year, he began to propagandize the new canvases among Moscow innovators, using every opportunity. *Every* opportunity. An impartial investigation of the situation in fall 1915 entirely refutes the prejudiced stories of Malevich's opponents, who tried to prove that he had jealously kept his discovery secret all the way up to the "0.10" December vernissage in Petrograd.

Suprematism's public debut had in fact taken place a month and a half before, on November 6, 1915, when the "Exhibition of Modern Decorative Art: Embroidery and Carpets from Artists' Designs" opened. This was the first major show in Moscow to be organized by the Kiev Handicraft Society, whose vice chair was N. M. Davydova (in the reviews she is sometimes referred to as the "chair"). Exhibited in the Moscow gallery were works completed in the workshops at Verbovka, Chigirinsky district, Kiev province, and Skoptsy, Pereyaslavsky district, Poltava province. The former was directed by N. M. Davydova and A. A. Exter; the latter by Ye. I. Pribylskaia and the estate's owner, A. V. Semigradova. The exhibition ran from November 6 to 20, 1915, at the K. Lemercier Gallery.

This date, November 6, 1915, would become the historic date of Suprematism's public birth because it was then that viewers saw three geometric abstract compositions by Malevich for the first time. In 1993, Charlotte Douglas proposed the hypothesis that Suprematism's debut was not the "0.10" exhibition, which opened on December 19, 1915, in Petrograd, but the November Moscow exhibit of decorative works. The perceptiveness of her hypothesis was confirmed by photographs discovered in the Moscow press of November 1915, which have allowed us to say which works the artists exhibited as designs for applied art works, about which more below.

One of these photographs was published by Douglas without a source citation in her article on the rise of abstract art in England and Russia.<sup>72</sup> Douglas unambiguously stressed that "It is known that he had been working on Suprematism since May, so it should not be surprising that Malevich's new style actually made its debut not at "0.10" but as designs for needlework at the *Modern Decorative Art* exhibition in Moscow a month and a half earlier."<sup>73</sup> Questions about the confrontation in the Moscow circle and his colleagues'