

Katia Baudin of the Ludwig Museum in Cologne  
Talks to Ariane Hofstetter



Liubov Popova, *Self Portrait*, 1915  
Ludwig Museum, Cologne

■ The Ludwig Museum in Cologne held an International Symposium on 18 June 2010 entitled, *Malevich Under the Microscope*. The idea was to create a platform for dialogue between art historians and scientists, the one group looking at *what* Malevich was painting while the other group was looking at *how* Malevich was painting. This dialogue took place in a museum renowned for its collection of Russian Avant-Garde works of art and the Symposium presented the opportunity to talk to Katia Baudin, Deputy Director of the Ludwig Museum, about the museum's commitment to the interaction of art historical and scientific investigation into its collection. Katia Baudin is also Curator of Russian Art and she initiated what the museum calls a "project series" to study and promote their unique Russian Avant-Garde collection.

We first wanted to know something about the creation of the collection, and about Mr. and Mrs. Ludwig themselves.

■ Ariane Hofstetter – Ms. Baudin, the Ludwig Museum opened the doors of its very modern building in the centre of Cologne, designed by the Cologne architects Bussman + Haberer, in 1986. Who were the Ludwigs?

■ Katia Baudin – Peter and Irene Ludwig, honorary citizens of Cologne for their outstanding contributions to the city, were avid art collectors who had a visionary farsightedness. They both had degrees in art history and Mrs. Ludwig continues to be involved in the activities of the museum. The Munheim-Ludwig families are manufacturers of fine chocolates ([www.ludwigstiftung.de](http://www.ludwigstiftung.de)). The Ludwigs had begun buying art in the 1950s and were originally interested in classical and medieval art, but they also bought fine pieces of Chinese and Indian art, as well as Pre-Columbian and African art. At the beginning

of the 1960s they turned their eyes to Picasso and the Expressionists, but it was contemporary art of their own time that initially made their collection quite exceptional. They were among the first to buy American Pop Art, collecting the most outstanding of these artists. There are major works by Robert Rauschenberg, Jasper Johns, Andy Warhol, Roy Lichtenstein, James Rosenquist, Robert Indiana, Claes Oldenburg, Jim Dine, Tom Wesselmann, and others in the collection. Today the Ludwig Museum comprises over 1,000 objects altogether, including the large number of important Russian Avant-Garde works.

■ A. H. – I seem to remember hearing that works from their collection had been seen in special exhibitions even before the museum opened. Did the Ludwigs lend their works to exhibitions?

■ K. B. – Indeed, the Ludwigs always intended that their collection be for the public, not just for their own enjoyment. They loaned a number of their important canvases to the 1968 exhibition of the most contemporary art organised by the Wallraf-Richartz Museum in Cologne, with Pop Art being much discussed in the press and attracting international acclaim. The exhibition was a great success. But the Ludwigs were always happy to contribute to the collections of other museums by filling certain gaps they may have had. The year 1957 marks the beginning of a continuous engagement for the benefit of many museums both at home and abroad. Donations of works from the Ludwig Collection are to be found in more than twenty museums, among them Aachen, Bamberg, Koblenz, Oberhausen and Saarlouis in Germany; Basel in Switzerland; Budapest in Hungary; Vienna in Austria; St. Petersburg in Russia; and even in China in Beijing.

- A. H. – When was the museum actually founded?
- K. B. – The collection was first opened to the public in 1976 in a large house near the centre of Cologne, where it could be seen during construction of the museum itself. The Ludwigs initially donated 300 contemporary works which, as well as their Pop Art collection, included American, German, French, and Swiss artists such as Georg Baselitz, Hanne Darboven, Nancy Graves, Donald Judd, Yves Klein, Sol LeWitt, Robert Morris, A. R. Penck, Gerhard Richter, Niki de Saint Phalle, Daniel Spoerri, and Jean Tinguely.
- A. H. – When did the Ludwigs become interested in the Russian Avant-Garde?
- K. B. – About 1970. The Ludwigs had first collected East German art but then they became captivated by the Russians, which became a main focus of their interest



Alexandra Exter, *Dynamics of Colour*, c. 1916-17  
Oil on canvas, 89.5 x 54 cm  
Ludwig Museum, Cologne

into the 1980s. These works were purchased mainly from the Cologne Galerie Gmurzynska, and it is probably the most complete survey of Russian Avant-Garde painting in any Western museum. The Ludwigs have given 250 Russian Avant-Garde works to the museum, partly as a gift and partly on permanent loan. The collection includes very important pieces by Kazimir Malevich, Aleksandr Rodchenko, Liubov Popova, Olga Rozanova, Alexandra Exter, Mikhail Larionov, Nikolai Suetin, Ilya Chasnik, and many others. To this has been added the collection of Josef Haubrich who had given his Expressionist paintings and works by Russian artists such as Marc Chagall and Alexis Jawlensky to the Wallraf-Richartz Museum. With the extensive donation of Peter and Irene Ludwig it became necessary to separate the collection of modern art from the art of the medieval period to the early twentieth century belonging to the Wallraf-Richartz Museum.

- A. H. – Are Russian Avant-Garde works still being added to the museum's collection?
- K. B. – Yes. We recently acquired 234 photographs of the Soviet avant-garde of the 1920s and 1930s, assembled by Daniela Mrazkova, a Czech journalist, author, and exhibition organiser who lives in Prague. These works will be shown in the Ludwig Museum until the autumn of 2010. Our latest acquisition is a set of Rosta posters of the early 1920s – those posters for which Vladimir Mayakovsky is famous. These works were acquired by the Friends of Art for the Ludwig Museum.
- A. H. – The museum has already had an exhibition called “A Slap in the Face of Public Taste – Cubo-Futurism and the Rise of Modernism in Russia“, which opened in May 2009. In February 2010 its “Kazimir Malevich and Suprematism in the Ludwig Collection” was opened. You seem to be planning a series of exhibitions to show your Russian Avant-Garde collection.
- K. B. – This is what we are calling our “project series”. By this we mean that we didn't want to do a huge exhibition showing all our works at once. We decided instead to do a series of small cabinet-like exhibitions, each one focused on an aspect of the Russian Avant-Garde. This would communicate the different perspectives about the collection. We could also complement the exhibitions with symposia and other events, and above all it gave us the opportunity to show the results of the investigations carried out by our conservation-restoration department.

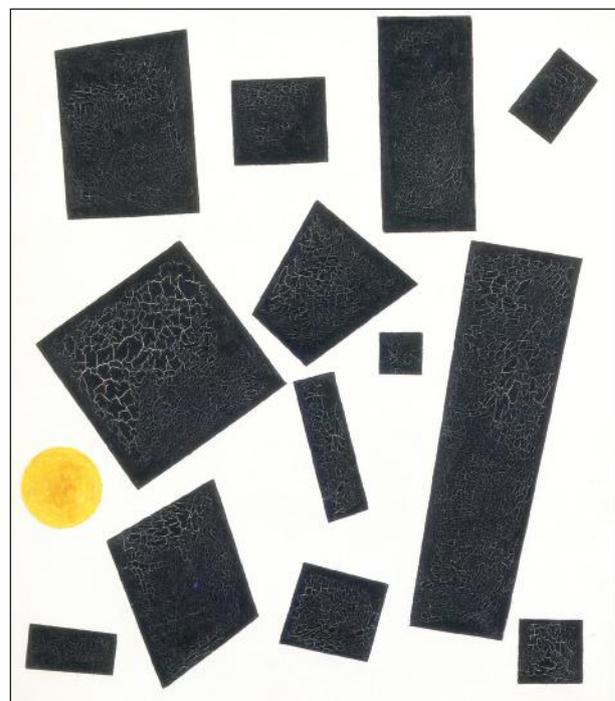


Kazimir Malevich, *Dynamic Suprematism*, 1916  
 Oil on canvas, 102.4 x 66.9 cm  
 Ludwig Museum, Cologne

- A. H. – Does the museum have a specifically scientific focus on the works, then?
- K. B. – We have analysed and restored 250 Russian Avant-Garde works, a project that has lasted for two years. In the current Malevich and Suprematism exhibition – which goes on until 22 August – we have included information on the technical examination of two paintings by Malevich, a kind of behind-the-scenes view for the visitor. The concept of this room is by Petra Mandt of the conservation and restoration department. Historic photographs from the years 1915 and 1933 present an overview of the two paintings by Malevich, and their provenances are indicated. The restoration history of the painting, *Dynamic Suprematism (Supremus No. 38)* of 1916, gives an idea of the history of the Russian museum from which it came and the history of this collection in light of the changes in Soviet museum policy. This painting, restored in 1975, is to be compared to the recent restoration of the painting, *Suprematist Composition*, of 1915. It

was re-restored for the museum's collection and its very painterly quality and the subtle handling of the pigments can once again be experienced by the visitor. Both paintings have undergone in-depth scientific analyses which include infrared reflectography, X-ray, and pigment analyses, providing detailed insight into the genesis of the painting. In addition, the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam lent us a preparatory drawing for *Supremus No. 38* which enabled us to make comparisons. We found that the large yellow geometric plane was originally blue, a transformation occurring during the painting process. In the context of the scientific analyses, the main focus was to establish basic documentation for the restoration. Together, the work on these two paintings offers insights into the condition of the paintings and the process by which they were made.

- A. H. – Do you think this presentation of the scientific aspects of works of art is a new trend in museum exhibitions?
- K. B. – Most large museums have conservation and restoration departments, but research carried out by them has traditionally been to preserve and conserve their works in order to display them to the public. The Ludwig Museum also has its own conservation and restoration department but it wants to share its research and its findings with the public and with other museums who are also investigating



Kazimir Malevich, *Suprematism*, 1915. (Before restoration)  
 Oil on canvas, 70 x 60 cm  
 Ludwig Museum, Cologne

and conserving their collections. This information is now acknowledged as being an important part of the history of the work of art which is why the Ludwig Museum is interested in taking part in the scientific discourse.

■ A. H. – What is this scientific work contributing to our knowledge about the work of art?

■ K. B. – Collecting always involves questions that must be asked. The main emphasis of the planned research projects are, besides the basic research, artists' ways of working, dating works of art, research into the framing of works by the artists especially in the context of how the works were first exhibited, provenance research, and so on. In the current exhibition, for example, we show some fifty works without frames in order to give an idea of how the paintings were displayed by the artists themselves. Much of this is all part of the history of art, information which only a conservation/restoration department can provide. It is a work in progress in which research builds up progressively.

■ A. H. – Is this what led the museum to plan the International Symposium, *Malevich Under the Microscope*?

■ K. B. – Yes, the Ludwig Museum also wants to co-operate with internationally renowned experts, both art historians and scientists. This combination of the work of art historians and scientists is supposed to help us understand the works better. One of the main issues with Malevich is the apparent contradictions in the way he worked. Especially interesting is the analysis of his painting technique before and after abstraction. There are also several versions of some of his paintings and the problem is how to date them. He was a very complex and innovative artist. Both art historians and scientists can contribute information to this, from the point of view of the pigments he used or the way he prepared the canvas at different periods, for example. It is a one-on-one dialogue, the two worlds of the art historian and the conservation specialist both helping to gain deeper insight into the working methods and evolution of Malevich's paintings.

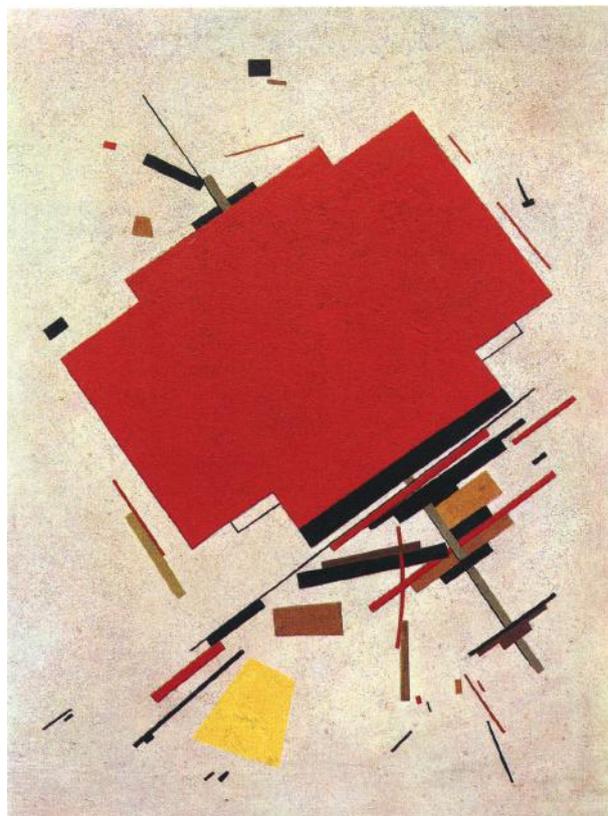
■ A. H. – This interdisciplinary approach to an artist's works is very new. Did the idea for such a symposium come from the curators or from the conservators, or both?

■ K. B. – We are all committed to this interdisciplinary approach but it was Petra Mandt in the conservation department who proposed such an exciting symposium.

The idea was to bring together new research from both fields, to share it and to integrate it.

■ A. H. – What is the Ludwig Museum planning for the future?

■ K. B. – There will be one or two Russian Avant-Garde exhibitions a year until 2012, accompanied by more symposia. We are planning catalogues on the Russian Avant-Garde collection with notes on works which are more than just notes for this will be supplemented by documentary material. This information will be published in the form of a catalogue and aimed at both the visitor to the museum as well as at specialists. The Ludwig Museum wants to move more into the public eye in Germany, we want to rehabilitate the museum in German awareness. We also want to increase international awareness and the prominence of the Ludwig Museum as an important institution involved in new art historical and scientific research. We want to put the Ludwig Museum on the map in the domain of its Russian Avant-Garde collection.



Nikolai Suetin, *Suprematism*, c. 1922  
Oil on canvas, 65 x 48 cm  
Ludwig Museum, Cologne