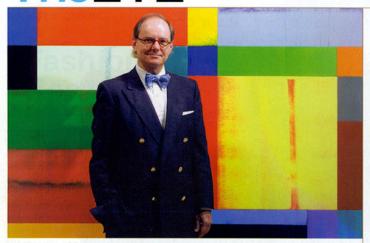


TheEYE



RUSSIAN EVOLUTION

MARTIN MULLER'S MODERNISM, INC., IS ONE OF THE MOST renowned art galleries in San Francisco. Over the past 27 years, Swiss-born Muller has hosted some 500 exhibitions at his Market Street location, and his greatest passion is Russian avant-garde art (1910–1930), currently popular among collectors both in the United States and abroad.

What was your first important show at the gallery?

In 1980 I did a Russian avant-garde show, the first ever in an American gallery outside of New York. I offered a Symbolist painting by Kasimir Malevich, which sold for \$75,000. Today it would be worth \$3 to \$4 million. I also had major works by Rodchenko, Popova, Goncharova and Exter. Today the Russian oligarchs are buying them up at auction because they want to reclaim their cultural heritage.

A Cubo-Futurist work by Bogomazov just sold in London for \$1.2 million. What's your reaction?
I'm glad! I did the first one-man show outside of Russia for Bogomazov in 1983. The works were priced from \$20,000 to \$30,000. I still have many great Bogomazovs.

Why the focus on Russian art?

Literature and art theory led me into the Russian constellation of artists.

I was obsessed with Russian literature, from Turgenev and Dostoyevksy to Vladimir Mayakovsky and Mikhail Bulgakov. I had visited Russia as a student in 1970—the KGB used to search my room regularly. While studying in Lausanne I broke my leg in a motorcycle accident and had to live at home.

I read Vassily Kandinsky's treatise *The Spiritual in Art* and it changed my life.

How do you decide which artists to show?

I only exhibit artists that I respond to emotionally and intellectually. The art must be visually strong and theoretically articulate. It can't just be decorative.

> Modernism, Inc., (415) 541-0461, www.modernisminc.com.

Pacesetter

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