

# THE ART OF LIVING

MARIANKA SWAIN SHARES HER CAPITAL CULTURAL HIGHLIGHTS

## PICK OF THE MONTH

### RUSSIAN PHANTOMS

"The centenary of the Russian Revolution was our starting point," says curator Eszter Steierhoffer of this new exhibition at the Design Museum. "Right after the Revolution, Moscow was named the capital of the Soviet Union, and artists, architects and designers set out to remake the city – and, by association, society."

The six chosen case studies are utopian visions that went unrealised, each reflecting a theme; this architecture "was explicitly political and existential". The exhibition begins in the progressive 1920s and ends in the early 1930s, as "architecture is becoming propaganda – more about influencing ideas than having a direct impact on people's lives."

The ambition is staggering: Leonidov's Lenin Institute, which proposed a library of 15 million books, making "all human knowledge" freely available; Sokolov's Health Factory, a Black Sea retreat with individual capsules for rest; Ladovsky's Communal House, which aimed to transform the role of women in domestic life; or Lissitzky's Cloud Iron skyscrapers, directly connecting office and living space with tram and metro stations in a bid to reduce Moscow's overcrowding.

They remained 'phantom' projects. "Some weren't technically feasible at the time, some lacked funding, or the architects fell out of political favour. But they keep occupying our imagination. Alfred H. Barr, Jr., then director of MOMA, saw designs for the Lenin Institute; by 1939, the centrepiece of the New York World's Fair echoed its shape and form. The 1951 Festival of Britain too – they're travelling concepts. Our contemporary landscape is full of these forms."

The designs are displayed via large-scale reproductions, alongside media reflecting their ideas – from film, photography and textile to print, collage and porcelain – and contextualising propaganda posters.

There's also a room dedicated to the Lenin Mausoleum, "which still stands in the Red Square – the geographical and ideological centre of the Soviet Union. Many buildings were inspired by Leninism, so it was important to include, and we're also showing something that's never been seen in the Western world: entries from the mausoleum's democratic design competition, sent in by peasants, factory workers, students, artists."

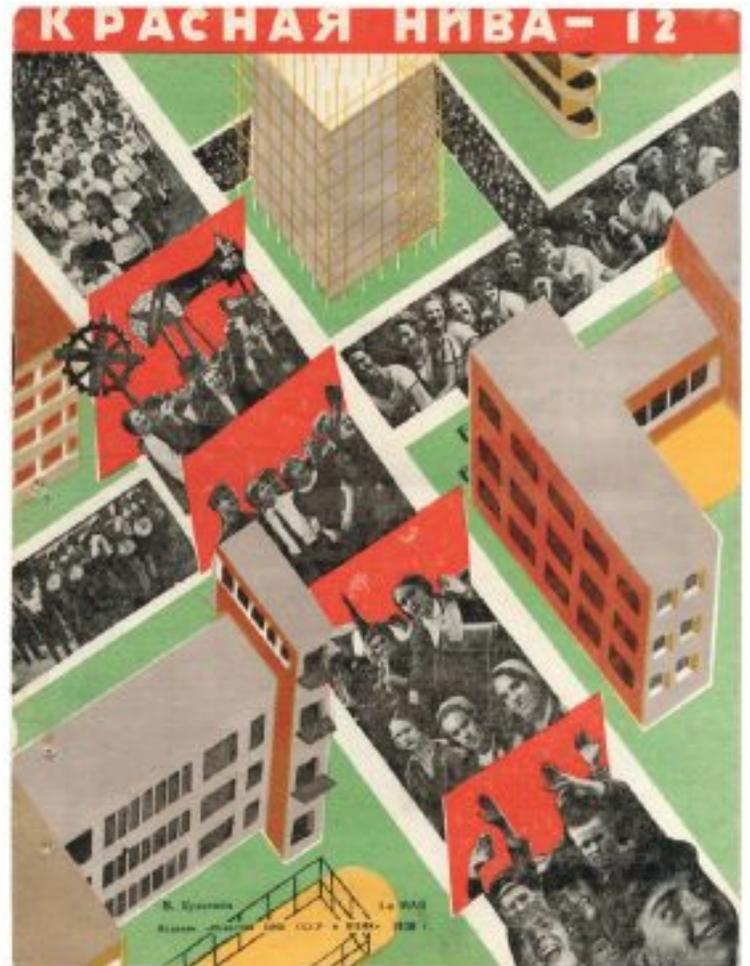
Eszter hopes visitors will come to understand the enduring influence of this period and see how the issues addressed are still pertinent. "One thing we're missing in today's architecture is that social aspect – perhaps it will motivate contemporary practitioners. In the early days after the Revolution, there was such a deep understanding that architecture isn't just about form: it's about creating a new world."

### IMAGINE MOSCOW UNTIL JUNE 4

Design Museum, Kensington W8  
Adults £10, 6-15 £5, under-6s free  
[www.designmuseum.org](http://www.designmuseum.org)



Ivan Leonidov's competition design for a monument to Moscow's first artificial earth satellite, 1958



Valentina Kulagina's cover design for 'Krasnaya niva' magazine, 1930

## DON'T MISS

### AMERICAN ABYSS

A major Royal Academy exhibition goes back to the 1930s – an extraordinarily turbulent decade for the USA. The Wall Street crash and subsequent Great Depression, rural drought and unemployment, urbanisation and immigration, and the international rise of Fascism combined to create an all-too-familiar picture: the apparently disenfranchised hankering after an idyllic past in the face of seismic change.

From Thomas Hart Benton's rural traditionalism to Edward Hopper's disquieting Gas, Joe Jones's graphic depiction of KKK "justice", Grant Wood's iconic American Gothic, and the stirrings of Abstract Expressionism via Arthur Dove and an early Jackson Pollock, it's a fascinatingly eclectic collection: artists searching for a defining national identity.

### AMERICA AFTER THE FALL UNTIL JUNE 4

Royal Academy of Arts, Piccadilly W1J  
Adults £12, under-16s free  
[www.royalacademy.org.uk](http://www.royalacademy.org.uk)



'American Gothic', Grant Wood, 1930

## COMMUTER CORNER

*Fever Dream*, the debut novel from Argentinian short story writer Samanta Schweblin – translated from Spanish by Megan McDowell – lives up to its title: surreal, elliptical and intimately unsettling (hardback £12.99, Kindle £8.64). In a rural hospital, Amanda lies in a bed, engaged in a nightmarish dialogue with a precocious child. Body horror, taut thriller and supernatural dread meet the psychological challenges of family.

Or check out S-Town, the latest binge-ready true crime podcast from the makers of Serial. Reporter and podcast host Brian Reed is drawn to the small, gun-toting town of Woodstock, Alabama, when eccentric resident John B. McLemore asks him to investigate the son of a wealthy clan who's allegedly bragged about getting away with murder. It's part Southern Gothic gripping mystery, part empathetic meditation on rural America in the age of Trump.

How are you livening up your commute?  
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