

# Beyond Cubism

A dynamic, intensely colorful painting by a member of the Russian avant-garde comes to Cleveland



Aleksandra Exter (Russian, 1882–1949). *Landscape with Houses and Trees*, about 1914–15. Oil on canvas, 79.5 x 54.5 cm. John L. Severance Fund 2008.37

As a leading artist of the Russian avant-garde, Aleksandra Exter (1882–1949) played a crucial role in transmitting new developments in the visual arts to her native country through a collaborative relationship with Cubists, Futurists, Suprematists, Rayonists, and Constructivists. Exter's *Landscape with Houses and Trees* of 1914–15, recently acquired by the Cleveland Museum of Art, is the first painting by Exter or any other artist of the Russian avant-garde to enter the collection. The acquisition is particularly significant since for several decades Exter served as a crucial link between modernist culture in Eastern and Western Europe.

Exter was born in Belostok near the current border between Poland and Belarus. After receiving her initial art training in Kiev, she began visiting Paris in 1907. Over the next few years she developed close relationships with Pablo Picasso, Georges Braque, Robert Delaunay, Fernand Léger, and Ardengo Soffici. Along with Léger and Marcel Duchamp, she contributed to the celebrated Section d'Or exhibition of dissident Cubists that opened in Paris in 1912. In 1914 she visited Italy and exhibited with the Italian Futurists in Rome, and in the spring of the same year joined with Kasimir Malevich, Marc Chagall, Wassily Kandinsky, and Alexander Archipenko in the landmark exhibition of Russian avant-garde art held at the Salon des Indépendants in Paris.

Exter was just as active in her native Russia. In 1908 she joined an avant-garde group in Kiev, then participated in the



This well-worn photograph shows Exter at the Tramway exhibition, Petrograd (St. Petersburg), 1915. © Palace Editions, The State Russian Museum, Moscow

Triangle exhibition in St. Petersburg in 1910, all of the Jack of Diamonds exhibitions in Moscow from 1910 to 1914, and the exhibition "No. 4" of Russian Futurists, Rayonists, and Primitives held in Moscow in 1914. These groups, especially the Jack of Diamonds led by Mikhail Larionov and Natalia Goncharova, dedicated themselves to transmitting Cubism and other avant-garde styles to Russia. As a prominent member of several such groups, Exter played a key role in bringing the Russia avant-garde to a prominent position in the international art world.

