



# Project model for a communal housing unit (reconstruction 1970)

Moisey (Foster Ginzburg)

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## Not on display

**Title/Description:** Project model for a communal housing unit (reconstruction 1970)

**Artist/Maker:** Moisey (Foster Ginzburg)

**Born:** 1928

**Object Type:** Architectural Model

**Materials:** Wood, pine, plywood, emulsion paint

**Measurements:** h. 97 x w. 70 x d. 242 cm

**Accession Number:** 31249

**Historic Period:** 20th century

**Credit Line:** Arts Council

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This reproduction of Moisei Ginzburg's proposal for a communal housing unit was constructed for display in the exhibition 'Arts in Revolution: Soviet Art and Design After 1917.' The exhibition was produced in collaboration by the Arts Council and the Soviet Ministry of Culture, and was held at the Haywood Gallery, London in 1971. The exhibition brought together work from the first Soviet designers and architects, working in the years immediately following the October Revolution [1].

Moisei Ginzburg (1892-1946) was a theoretician of architectural constructivism during the early Soviet era. After the Revolution, Russia experienced a period of avant-garde exploration, as architects sought to find a new language appropriate for new political values. Ginzburg was a member of the constructivist group of architects, the Society of Contemporary Architects (OSA) established in 1925, and editor of the group's journal 'Contemporary Architecture' (SA) 1926-30 [2]. The group established working practices and extensive research into housing, which they published in SA.

The early 1920s saw new architectural briefs which were concerned with collective living. The OSA ran a competition amongst its members calling for, 'the creation of a *house-organism* to facilitate

novel productive and domestic relations between workers, leading to the notion of community' [3].

Entries were published in the OSA and later led to the development of standard apartment types for STROIKOM (the Building Committee of the Russian Republic). The Model of Communal Housing Unit is a reconstruction of one of these apartment types. Though a difficult economic context meant much of the exploration of the avant-garde was never built, the apartment types developed (for STROIKOM) were realized in six buildings [4], including the Narkomfin Building (Moscow, 1928-30) designed by Moisei Ginzburg and Ignaty Milinis. The Narkomfin building incorporates apartment types F and K which are innovatively arranged in section, allowing for three floors of economical bedrooms and bathrooms, to every two floors of light and generous living rooms [5]. A challenge for Ginzburg was how to transition residents, accustomed to living in separate households, to this new communal way of living [6]. Ginzburg developed a working method that involved all influences on the architecture (political, technical, economic), resulting in the concept of 'social condensers' to create social change [7]. In addition to publishing his theories in the SA, Ginzburg also published a number of books, in particular 'Dwelling: Five Years' Work on the Problem of the Habitation' (1934), which describes the approaches researched by Ginzburg and his colleagues at the OSA.

By the time the Narkomfin building was being constructed, Soviet architecture was known in the European architectural journals and ideas passed between the European and the Russian modernists. In particular, Le Corbusier is considered to have been influenced by Ginzburg and the Narkomfin building [8]. By the late 1920s, state interference began to put a stop to the pursuits of the OSA (and the wider modernist movement), and a new language architectural language was adopted.

Becka Crabtree, July 2022

[1] Haywood Gallery, 'Art in Revolution: Soviet Art and Design after 1917', *Google Arts & Culture*

<<https://artsandculture.google.com/story/art-in-revolution-soviet-art-and-design-after-1917-hayward-gallery/4wVhjzEVYXhYLw?hl=en>> [accessed 13 July 2022]

[2] Catherine Cooke, 'The Avant-Garde: Russian Architecture in the Twenties', ed. by Andreas C. Papadakis, *Architectural Design*, 61 (1991), 9-21 (p.14)

[3] Daniel Vega, 'Housing and Revolution: From the Dom-Kommuna to the Transitional Type of Experimental House (1926-30)', *Architectural Histories*, 8 (2020) <<http://doi.org/10.5334/ah.264>> [accessed 13 July 2022] (para.8)

[4] Vega, *Housing and Revolution*, para.1

[5] William Curtis, 'Architecture and Revolution in Russia', in *Modern Architecture Since 1900*, ed. by William Curtis (London: Phaidon, 1996), pp. 201-215 (p.209).

[6] Vega, *Housing and Revolution*, para.29

[7] Cooke, *Architectural Design*, p.15

[8] Curtis, *Modern Architecture Since 1900*, p.210

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## Further Reading

Cooke, Catherine, Russian avant-garde: theories of art, architecture, and the city, (London: Academy Editions, 1995)

Curtis, J.R. William, Modern Architecture Since 1900, 3rd edn (London: Phaidon, 1996; repr. 2001)

Frampton, Kenneth, Modern Architecture A Critical History, 4th edn (London: Thames and Hudson, 2007; repr. 2014)

Ginzburg, Moisei, Style and Epoch, trans. by Anatole Senkevitch (Cambridge Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1982)

Ginzburg, Moisei, Dwelling: Five Years' Work on the Problem of the Habitation, (London: Fontanka, 2017)

Gray, Camilla, The great experiment: Russian art 1863-1922, (London: Thames And Hudson, 1962)

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