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A “Russianesque Camera Artist”: Margaret Bourke-White’s American-Soviet Photography

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In May 1930, an unnamed journalist for the *Dayton Daily News* penned a brief article under the heading “Beauty in Industry Is Shown by Photographer in Unique Plat Studies.”¹ The subject of the report was Margaret Bourke-White (1904–1971), a twenty-five-year-old photographer raised in New Jersey and based in Cleveland at the time. Her skill in transforming industrial subjects into art and her recent hire by the new business magazine *Fortune* attracted broad notice in the press. The *Dayton Daily* supplied a typical profile, emphasizing Bourke-White’s youth and her fearless determination to work around heavy machinery. Yet one phrase in the article stands out—her description as a “Russianesque camera artist.”

Today, Bourke-White is remembered as a globetrotting photojournalist for *Life* magazine. But before joining *Life* in 1936, she had brokered a unique arrangement with *Fortune* magazine in 1929, spending half her time as its star photographer of business and industry features, and half her time on personal projects (mostly consisting of advertising commissions) at the Bourke-White Studio.² It was in the latter capacity as an independent photographer that she first traveled to Russia in 1930, then returned twice, in 1931 and 1932.³ Over the course of these three trips, she created an extensive body of photographs that would be featured in her first book, *Eyes on Russia* (1931), a six-part series in the *New York Times* (1932), a deluxe photo portfolio (1934), and a set of photomurals for the Soviet consulate in New York (1934). Still other photographs circulated in exhibitions, books, and periodicals around the globe, especially in Soviet magazines and postcards of the early 1930s.

Yet the *Dayton Daily* article predates the first of these visits to Russia by several months; in May 1930, Bourke-White had never left the United States. Soon after, she would obtain her first passport for a trip to Germany for *Fortune*, but entering Russia was still little more than a fantasy she had shared with a few close contacts. How, then, do we make sense of the journalist’s phrase? What might “Russianesque camera artist” have meant to the author and the *Dayton Daily*’s readers? And what might this designation—and Bourke-White’s deep engagement with Russia overall—mean for the history of interwar American photography?

If we survey the scholarly literature on Soviet-American artistic exchange, we find a pair of contradictory explanations. One camp maintains that an American photographer such as Bourke-White may have appropriated the stylistic techniques of the Soviet avant-garde—such as radical foreshortenings and oblique camera angles—for her own commercialized photography practice, but that she would otherwise have little in common with a fervently

communist photographer such as Alexander Rodchenko (1891–1956).⁴ A second vein of scholarship interprets the visual similarities between the photography of Rodchenko and Bourke-White as evidence of a shared ethos and political values.⁵ In the post-Soviet era, a third wave of scholarship has forged a middle path between these approaches. By engaging more deeply with the history of Soviet photography, these scholars place American and Soviet photographers on more equal ground without overstating or collapsing important historical differences.⁶ Their research has revealed important insights, but the full geopolitical and aesthetic range of Bourke-White’s Soviet photographs—and their attendant meanings—remain unexplored.

This essay continues the project of re-reading this American photographer’s body of work from the Soviet Union and its subsequent dissemination to international audiences. In order to contextualize these photographs, we must examine them alongside the written discourses that shaped their creation and recorded their reception. This evidence is complex, multilayered, and often contradictory; it points beyond Rodchenko and the Russian avant-garde to a wider group of Soviet and American photographers and critics, each of whom occupied unique but overlapping positions within the global field of photography of the early 1930s. As art historian Jordana Mendelson has stated, “To write generalizations of the 1930s is to fall into a series of traps.”⁷ By returning to objects and statements circulated at the time, this essay attempts to place the messiness of this endeavor in the foreground, not disentangling Bourke-White from this discourse, but instead revealing the extent of her entanglement.

Associations between certain visual styles and ideologies both within and across national contexts were shifting rapidly at precisely the moment of Bourke-White’s engagement with Russia. In the first half of the 1930s, traditional artistic styles did not always correlate with conservative political positions, just as modernist aesthetics did not guarantee leftist leanings on the part of photographers’ intentions or viewers’ interpretations. The semantic malleability of these photographs would solidify by the middle of the decade, but until then, Bourke-White’s Soviet work was open to an exceptionally broad range of perceived meanings. In short, Bourke-White’s photographs from the Soviet Union cannot be boiled down to one discrete geographical or ideological wellspring.

Each of the following sections discusses Bourke-White’s work in relation to a separate photographic genre—each loosely defined in terms of subject and style, and many of which were not regionally specific—in order to demonstrate how her Soviet photographs traversed disparate ideological and aesthetic contexts. These images were subject to different interpretations within and between these categories, which often blended into one another as much as they were considered separate or even diametrically opposed. In some cases, the American identity of their maker is asserted; at other times, this fact is obscured, or indeed made invisible, as the photographs melt into the pages of Soviet periodicals, “re-armed” by Soviet artists for Soviet audiences.⁸ The author of the *Dayton Daily* article likely invoked Russia as a vague reference to a place rejecting old artistic traditions and embracing an industrialized future, but the phrase describing Bourke-White as a “Russianesque camera artist” is particularly apt; her Americanness is implied or taken for granted, but the Russian styles of her work and persona sometimes enabled her photographs to cross the American horizon into the Soviet beyond.

Pictorialism

Most descriptions of Bourke-White in the 1930s tend to accentuate her modernism or the seeds of her later career as a photojournalist.⁹ Yet Bourke-White would have been familiar with the basic concepts of modernist photography as well as pictorialist photography—two stylistic modes in the history of photography that are typically separated into discrete chapters on either side of World War I, but which overlapped considerably throughout the period of Bourke-White’s engagement with Russia.¹⁰ Her initial training in photography under prominent American pictorialist Clarence H. White (1871–1925) involved the soft-focus, painterly aesthetic that we usually associate with Pictorialism today. But by the end of the decade, Bourke-White and other students of the Clarence H. White School of modern photography had embraced so-called straight photography—a style involving a sharper focus and less overt handwork on the final print. The Pictorial Photographers of America (PPA), another institution White founded in 1916, began advocating for the modernization of pictorialist photography while preserving its core principle of photography as fine art around the time that Bourke-White became a member in 1929.¹¹ Throughout her early career, she maintained ties with White’s former students, frequently mentioned her training with him in interviews, and regularly exhibited her work at pictorialist salons.¹²



Figs. 1, 2. Left: Margaret Bourke-White, *Locomotive Cranes*, 1930, from *Eyes on Russia* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1931), following p. 88. Halftone, 11 x 7 3/4 in. Right: Margaret Bourke-White, *The Woman Who Wept for Joy*, 1930, from *Eyes on Russia* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1931), following p. 56. Halftone, 11 x 7 3/4 in. Both images: © 2020 Estate of Margaret Bourke-White/Licensed by VAGA at Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY; photo by the author

Given this context, the pictorialist orientation of several photographs in Bourke-White’s Soviet oeuvre should be understood as integral rather than exceptional.¹³ Of the forty photographs in her first book, a narrative of her first trip to the Soviet Union published as *Eyes on Russia* in 1931, only about a quarter feature the semi-abstract studies of industrial machinery that undergird her association with modernism (fig. 1). The rest are architectural and landscape studies, formal portraits, and images of workers posed alongside the tools and objects of their labor (fig. 2). A significant portion of the epistolary commentaries in Bourke-White’s archive from friends and fans praised the photographs of *Eyes on Russia* in terms that are more pictorialist than modernist, admiring the beauty, expressiveness, and symbolic meanings contained in the images.¹⁴ Several newspaper reviewers similarly

remarked on the quality of the clouds visible in most of the outdoor photographs, directly overlooking the agricultural and industrial developments of the Five-Year Plan in the foreground.¹⁵ *Eyes on Russia* also impressed the members of the Professional Photographers' Club of New York; they invited Bourke-White to speak shortly after its publication and named her "America's Outstanding Pictorialist" in 1933, long after the movement's heyday.¹⁶

We might expect that pictorialist photography, modern or otherwise, would find few admirers in early Soviet Russia, especially given its historical reputation as a bourgeois pastime for elites, wholly removed from contemporary social issues facing the majority of the populace. Yet the classic style of Pictorialism, featuring soft-focus studies of picturesque or sentimental subjects, remained enormously popular in Soviet Russia around 1930 and provided an artistic standard for photographic printing and display.¹⁷ Boris Skvirsky, head of the Soviet Information Bureau in Washington, DC, in the years before Soviet-American diplomatic ties were established in 1933 and one of the key officials responsible for arranging Bourke-White's initial visit to Russia, apparently made soft-focus photographic studies of nude women in his spare time.¹⁸

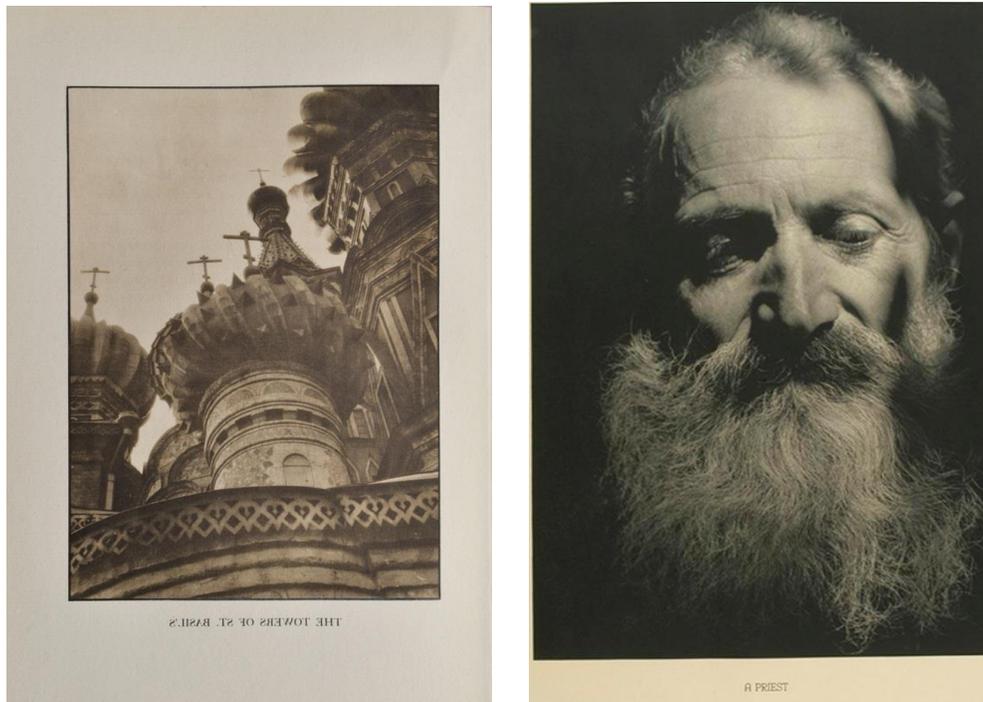
Leonid Mezhericher, a prolific photography critic and head of the foreign department of the Soviet photography agency Soyuzfoto, criticized the embrace of sentimentalism, individualism, and non-proletarian subjects among Soviet photographers.¹⁹ In a 1929 essay, he argued that VOKS, the office for foreign cultural relations that arranged the visits of Bourke-White and all other foreign photographers and cultural figures, had "distorted" the representation of Soviet photography abroad by catering to bourgeois tastes and "perverting" the proletarian class line.²⁰ Statements from Bourke-White in the early 1930s indicate that Mezhericher had reason to be concerned: even after her series of three visits to Russia, she still believed that Russian photography was hampered by outdated practices and material shortages.²¹ Yet the agreement between Mezhericher and Bourke-White on the backwardness of certain pictorialist traditions ended here. In a pair of later articles, he would disparage the compositions and resultant ideological messages of Bourke-White's American photography in a warning to Soviet photographers not to follow her example.²²

In relation to Pictorialism alone, we can already detect how broad and complex the field of photography was around 1930 in both the United States and Soviet Union. These examples also illustrate how Bourke-White's involvement in an American movement to modernize Pictorialism paralleled developments in Soviet Pictorialism, where pressures to modernize were not only aesthetic but also political. Because her photographs bridged the stylistic tendencies of Pictorialism and modernism, we can understand why they would have been appealing to progressive and conservative audiences for photography on both sides of the world.

Travel Photography

If pictorialist photography favored certain stylistic approaches that could be applied to a variety of subjects, the reverse is true for travel photography, which presents a more discrete set of subjects through a variety of stylistic modes. Bourke-White's Soviet work is replete with images of scenic landscapes, historic buildings, and romanticized figures that draw from the long history of exotic or quaint Russian travel motifs in books, magazines, illustrated lectures, and stereographs. Many of these types of photographs appeared in

Bourke-White’s 1931 book, which joined a slew of Russian travelogues by American authors that catered to the growing interest in the Socialist experiment after the stock market crash in October 1929.²³ Her description of Moscow includes an encounter with the towers of St. Basil’s Cathedral on Red Square, an icon of Slavic culture and a near-obligatory stop in any foreigner’s visit to Russia (fig. 3).²⁴ Several portraits in the book and in a deluxe portfolio of Bourke-White’s Soviet photography released in 1934 draw from the longstanding conventions of depicting Russian “types” in appropriate dress, including the perennial Russian classics, *A Peasant* and *A Priest* (fig. 4).²⁵ Other portraits are updated to include the new Soviet personages, such as *A Russian Worker* and *A Girl Conductor on a Russian Train*.



Figs. 3, 4. Left: Margaret Bourke-White, *The Towers of St. Basil's*, 1930, from *Eyes on Russia* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1931), following p. 70. Halftone, 11 x 7 3/4 in. Right: © 2020 Estate of Margaret Bourke-White/Licensed by VAGA at Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY; photo by the author. Right: Margaret Bourke-White, *A Priest*, 1932, from *Margaret Bourke-White: USSR Photographs* (Albany, NY: Argus Press, 1934). Photogravure, 20 x 14 in. (sheet).1934. Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Gift of Mike and Mickey Marvins, 2013.729.6. All Rights Reserved © 2020 Estate of Margaret Bourke-White/Licensed by VAGA at Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY; courtesy of Museum of Fine Arts, Houston

Picturesque travel images from Russia also featured prominently in American periodicals, which published shorter travel narratives and journalistic reports for specialized and popular audiences. *Fortune* became the first American magazine to publish Bourke-White’s Russian photographs in the February 1931 issue with a stand-alone photographic feature titled “Soviet Panorama.”²⁶ Three of the nine photographs in this portfolio depict distant views of landscapes under cloudy skies. The caption for one of these photographs states, “Few scenes of the Russian landscape are as typical as the above. It often seems to the traveler that Russia is nothing but an endless plain stretching away to an infinity where the horizons meet.”²⁷

Other captions in the portfolio highlighted the contributions of American industrialists working in the Soviet Union. Although the US government maintained its non-recognition policy through Herbert Hoover's presidency, from 1928 to 1932, major American corporations, such as Ford Motors, and respected dam engineers accepted invitations from the Soviet state to share their expertise on heavy machinery and modern production. Despite the fact that they were directly involved in building communally owned factories and infrastructure, *Fortune* framed the US economic system as superior, noting the increased capacities of their industries in comparison with the Soviet ones in Bourke-White's photographs.

Additional popular magazines, such as *Cosmopolitan*, *Vanity Fair*, and *Ladies' Home Journal*, published Bourke-White's photographs with regularity, but never as stand-alone features. Her images of Russian Orthodox Churches, children, and industrial workers serve as generic illustrations for travel narratives about Russia from a variety of well-known authors, including Julian Huxley, Emil Ludwig, Anne O'Hare McCormick, and George Bernard Shaw.²⁸ Whereas these writers offered explicit observations about socialism in their articles, the magazine editors conceived of Bourke-White's photographs as decorative appendages to catch a reader's interest (fig. 5).²⁹ A slightly different approach can be found in Bourke-White's 1932 series for the *New York Times*, featuring six of her own articles illustrated with two to four photographs each.³⁰ Here, her photographs of Soviet citizens at the circus or eating borscht directly correlate with the lighthearted anecdotes in the text, but again the images align with popular-interest journalism rather than a serious investigation of life under socialism.



Fig. 5. Margaret Bourke-White, Untitled, 1931; Margaret Bourke-White, Untitled, 1931, from *World's Work*, February 1932, 30–31. © 2020 Estate of Margaret Bourke-White/Licensed by VAGA at Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY; courtesy of the University of Chicago Library

We might not expect photographs intended for the foreign gaze to appeal to Soviet authorities in the 1930s, but the ongoing development of the Soviet tourism industry under the auspices of Intourist (founded in 1929) placed these images in high demand. As a state-run agency, Intourist particularly hoped to increase revenue from the growing number of

international travelers flocking to Russia to see the first socialist state for themselves.³¹ Americans comprised a significant portion of these visitors, and Intourist hoped that Bourke-White would play a key role in enticing still more to make the transatlantic journey.³² A 1932 contract between Bourke-White and Intourist shows that she agreed to supply the agency with a minimum of fifty photographs in exchange for “an automobile in Moscow and a capable guide throughout her travels in the U.S.S.R.”³³ A list of requested photographs included St. Basil’s Cathedral and the historic churches inside the Kremlin, then undergoing restoration. This represented a highly selective view of Soviet religious tolerance, as most other churches in Moscow were then being closed or demolished.³⁴ Bourke-White held up her end of the bargain, sending hundreds of prints to Moscow during 1932 and 1933.³⁵

Several of these photographs, and a few made on previous visits, appeared alongside credit lines for Bourke-White in four issues of *Soviet Travel*, an illustrated monthly magazine published in English by Intourist starting in February 1932.³⁶ Each of these issues appeared during the transition period between the Soviet decrees banning all independent artistic groups in April 1932 and the mandating of Socialist Realism as the official (and only) artistic style of the Soviet Union in August 1934. Perhaps for this reason, Bourke-White’s

photographs were printed among the work of Soviet photographers that had recently belonged to rival factions with competing ideas about the correct stylistic approach to Soviet photography. Her rectilinear photograph of the Kazan Railway Station in Moscow appears beneath Boris Ignatovich’s unconventional view of a monument to Pushkin, partially obscured by an electric lamppost (fig. 6).³⁷ Just one month prior to publication, Ignatovich had represented the radical Oktiabr’ photography group, which theorized experimental photography as a means of fostering a revolutionary consciousness in the viewer. In the following article, Bourke-White’s photograph of the seventeenth-century Novodevichy Monastery matches the picturesque glow and easy legibility of Arkady Shaikhet’s photograph of the Moscow Kremlin on the opposite page.³⁸ Shaikhet had led the Russian Association of Proletarian Photo-Reporters (ROPF), which advocated for the significance of clear photographic content above formal concerns in opposition to the Oktiabr’ photographers.³⁹ A third pair of photographs in this issue illustrates how these photographers occasionally adopted different styles: a Bourke-White image of the Bolshoi Theater colonnade from a worm’s-eye view appears beside another Ignatovich photograph, this time featuring a straightforward depiction of a monument in front of the Marx-Engels-Lenin Institute.⁴⁰

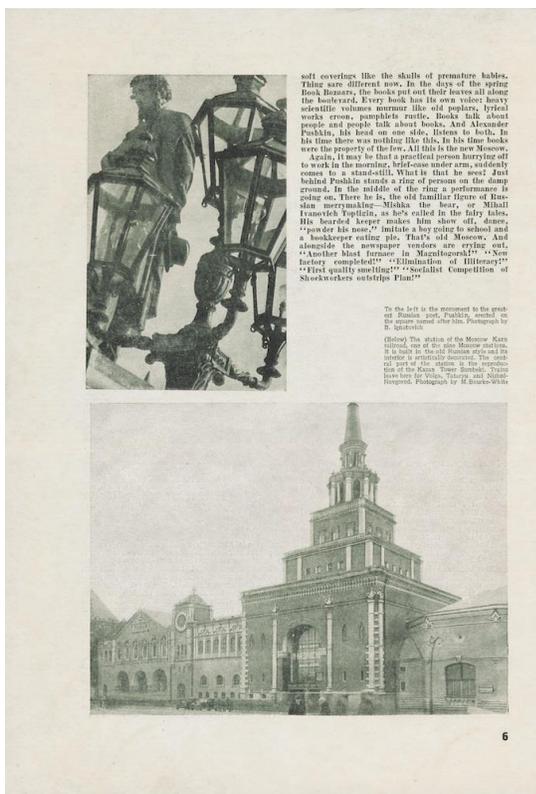


Fig. 6. Boris Ignatovich, Untitled, c. 1932; Margaret Bourke-White, Untitled, 1932, from *Soviet Travel* no. 4 (1932): 6. © 2020 Estate of Boris Ignatovich/UPRAVIS, Moscow/ARS, NY; 2020 Estate of Margaret Bourke-White/Licensed by VAGA at Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY; courtesy of the University of Chicago Library

A slightly different subset of Bourke-White’s photographs circulated on postcards printed at the Soviet state publishing house sometime in the early 1930s. Few examples of these ephemeral objects have been preserved, but they were likely available for purchase by international and domestic travelers in Russia.⁴¹ At least three of these postcards featured the industrial imagery of Dnieprostroi, the largest dam in Europe when completed in October 1932 and a major landmark for Soviet citizens and foreign travelers (fig. 7). Around the same time these postcards were made, the Soviet photography critic Mezhericher called for a reconceptualization of the postcard away from petty bourgeois entertainment toward a means of “agitation and propaganda, a conveyance of Bolshevik ‘information,’ i.e. a mobilization of the masses around the task of constructing socialism.”⁴² The postcards with Bourke-White’s photographs may not have fulfilled this mandate, but they did offer a proletarian alternative to the typical pretty or hackneyed postcard view by picturing a key symbol of the achievements of collective labor.

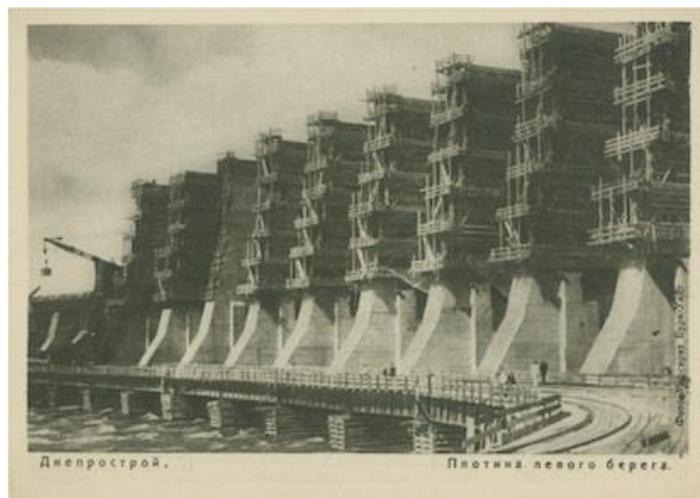


Fig. 7 *Dnieprostroi. Plotina levogo berega*, 1930. Postcard, 4 x 5 4/5 in. Ne boltai! Collection 12517. © 2020 Estate of Margaret Bourke-White/Licensed by VAGA at Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY; courtesy of Ne boltai! Collection

The conventions of travel photography therefore played a major role in shaping Bourke-White’s Soviet photographs, from the initial steps of determining a subject and how it would be photographed to the later decisions about circulation by publishers and editors. Whereas some American writers framed their travel narratives as explicitly political commentaries (with Bourke-White’s photographs beside them), her own writings tended to avoid overt political statements in order to increase their broad appeal. Her picturesque images of Russian tropes and photographs that prioritized composition over the presentation of concrete visual information helped to divert attention away from political readings, even though they were never far beneath the surface.

Industrial Photography

Bourke-White’s engagement with the Soviet Union coalesced around a unique period of its history: the First Five-Year Plan. Josef Stalin announced this massive program of rapid industrialization and modernization in late 1927. Over the following four years—the plan ended one year ahead of schedule, to be succeeded with the Second Five-Year Plan—the

Soviet Union would attempt to transform its outdated, agrarian economy into an efficient, machine-based one. As Soviet versions of America’s grandest industrial projects sprang into form seemingly overnight, Bourke-White saw an opportunity for adventure and a chance to expand her portfolio as an industrial photographer.⁴³

A broad definition of industrial photography might accommodate any photograph of an industrial subject, including machines, workers, and the products of their labor. Yet a narrower conception of industrial photography appeared in the interwar period that seemed wholly new to many American observers: specifically, the depiction of industrial subjects as art. Bourke-White rode the crest of this wave in the late 1920s and early 1930s, when dozens of American journalists and critics remarked that her photographs of smokestacks and factory interiors were surprisingly beautiful and constituted a “new field of art.”⁴⁴ With meticulous lighting techniques and creative camera angles, she could transform the image of a car factory or meat plant into an abstract pattern of rhythmically repeating shapes (fig. 8).

These types of photographs had led to her being hired at *Fortune* which, in turn, offered a steppingstone to Russia. While its editors declined to send Bourke-White there on official assignment, her *Fortune* credentials played a key role in securing her first Soviet visa in 1930 and gaining entry to new Soviet industrial sites.⁴⁵ Upon seeing samples of her work, which likely included copies of *Fortune*, the unofficial Soviet ambassador Skvirsky suggested that Bourke-White contribute to the newly established, deluxe propaganda magazine *SSSR na stroike* (*USSR in Construction*), “since the character of her work and the magazine are approximately similar.”⁴⁶ His observation was correct: both used photography to glorify and aestheticize industry. Indeed, *SSSR na stroike* had much in common with *Fortune*, despite their incongruous political ideologies of Soviet socialism and American capitalism, respectively. Launched a month apart in early 1930, both magazines employed the latest print technologies, placed a heavy emphasis on aesthetics, and used photography above other artistic media. Erika Wolf, a historian of Soviet photography, has shown that the editors of *SSSR na stroike* initially had ambitious aims to appeal to a particularly wide readership, from American businessmen to Soviet workers, with separate editions published in Russian, English, German, and French.⁴⁷ The two magazines therefore catered to overlapping audiences that found a common interest in modern industrial development, resulting in occasionally similar content and, with input from Bourke-White, the same photographs.

On the other hand, these magazines employed dissimilar editorial practices and favored different types of industrial photography. As mentioned, Bourke-White’s Russian portfolio in *Fortune* draws from the artistic traditions of pictorialist photography with its prevalence of deep shadows, dramatic skies, and picturesque vistas.⁴⁸ Beneath each photograph, detailed captions emphasize the initially slow progress of the Five-Year Plan despite the

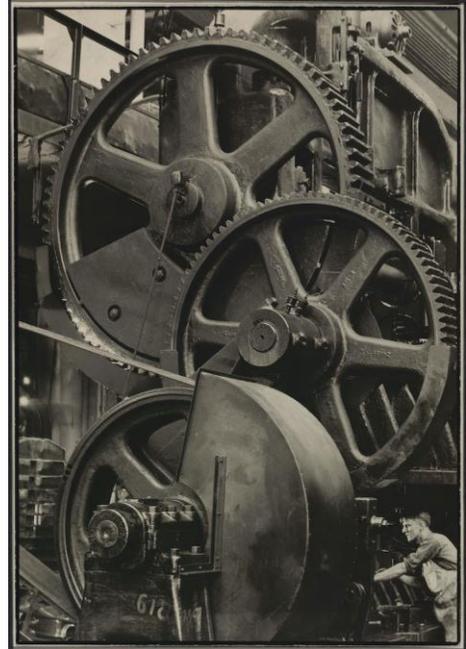


Fig. 8. Margaret Bourke-White, *Chrysler Corporation*, 1929. Gelatin silver print, 13 x 9 in. © 2020 Estate of Margaret Bourke-White/Licensed by VAGA at Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY; digital Image © The Museum of Modern Art/Licensed by SCALA/Art Resource, NY

essential assistance of American engineers. In *SSSR na stroike*, Bourke-White’s photographs (fig. 9) functioned more as artistic accents within a larger selection of generic, orthogonal images of industrial sites throughout the magazine. This arrangement aimed to balance aesthetic interest with the clear presentation of visual information. Even longer captions than those in *Fortune*’s portfolio describe the ascension of the socialist economic system over the exploitative system of American capitalism, again indicating the photographs’ dependence on external framing to communicate an explicit ideological message.



Figs. 9, 10. Left: Margaret Bourke-White, *Adjusting the Front Wheels of a Tractor on the Conveyor*, 1930; Margaret Bourke-White, *New Personnel Getting Acquainted with the Job*, 1930, from *USSR in Construction*, nos. 10/11, 1931, 34. © 2020 Estate of Margaret Bourke-White/Licensed by VAGA at Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY; photo by the author. Right: El Lissitzky, *Untitled*, 1932, from *SSSR na stroike* no. 10 (1932): n.p. © 2020 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York; photo by the author

For her part, Bourke-White was more concerned with the visual quality of the reproductions than with the politicized use of her work. She sent a strongly worded letter of complaint to the chief editor of *SSSR na stroike* in early March 1931, objecting to the retouching of and missing credit lines on her photographs.⁴⁹ She was unabashed in her opinion of the superiority of *Fortune* and sent the *SSSR na stroike* editor a copy of the American magazine so that he could “see how much better these pictures look when they are not retouched.”⁵⁰

SSSR na stroike did shift its editorial approach in the following years, but not along the lines Bourke-White had suggested. Her final photograph to appear in *SSSR na stroike* apparently escaped her notice—and that of later scholars—because it was effectively camouflaged within a photomontage designed by El Lissitzky (1890–1941). Today, Lissitzky is best known for his radical experimentation as a prominent representative of the Russian avant-garde, but he spent the last decade of his career primarily designing lesser-known books and periodicals, including nineteen issues of *SSSR na stroike*.⁵¹ The first of these appeared in October 1932—the same issue containing a photomontage with Bourke-White’s photograph of Dnieprostroi construction cranes set against the organic shapes of clouds (fig. 10). This photograph had previously appeared in *Eyes on Russia* (see fig. 1), but for *SSSR na stroike*, Lissitzky overlaid the photograph with multiple images of construction workers engaged in building the dam. Through Lissitzky’s modification, Bourke-White’s

photograph—and the American preference for single images over montages—is easily coopted into a monumental statement about Soviet progress.⁵²

Soviet Socialist Realism

The final photographic category under consideration in this essay is not one that existed, strictly speaking, outside the borders of the USSR. Yet the set of principles codified at the Soviet Writers Congress in August 1934 as the official artistic doctrine of the Soviet Union initially accommodated a broader range of art than is typically associated with Socialist Realism.⁵³ Every artistic medium underwent a process of refinement over the following years, but photography presented particular challenges as a medium that could be too real and not sufficiently socialist.⁵⁴ In other words, photographs in Soviet periodicals had to be careful to present a distinctly upbeat view of the cultural shifts underway during the Five-Year Plan, even as forced collectivization, shortages of housing and food, and class warfare led to widespread suffering. A survey of the main Soviet photography magazines in the years immediately following the imposition of Socialist Realism reveals a panoply of stylistic approaches to ideologically approved content: soft-focus landscape studies, portraits of smiling Soviet citizens at work and leisure, and an occasional oblique-angle view from above or below with radical foreshortening of the subject.⁵⁵

Given the porousness of the aesthetic, material, and geographic categories described so far, it should come as no surprise to find that several of Bourke-White’s photographs weathered the transition into the era of Socialist Realism. These include Lissitzky’s *SSSR na stroike* photomontage from 1932, which was republished as a solitary image in the main photography magazine *Sovetskoe foto* in April 1935.⁵⁶ Bourke-White’s installation of five photomurals at the Soviet Consulate in New York in May 1934 also remained on display until at least November 1934.⁵⁷ The photographs chosen for enlargement included images previously published in her 1931 book, her 1932 *New York Times* series, and on the cover of the Soviet film magazine *Prozhektor*, also in 1932. These photographs were not new in 1934, but they had been carefully vetted through previous editorial processes and met the approval of the consul general.

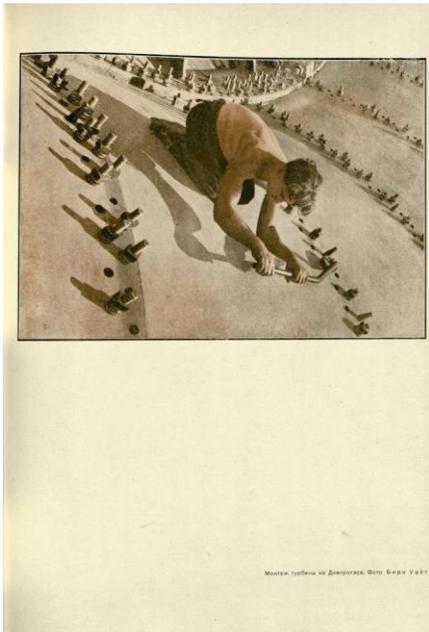


Fig. 11. Margaret Bourke-White, *Montazh turbini na Dnieprogresye*, 1930. Rotogravure, 13 x 9 in. (page). In *Industriia sotsializma*, vol. 3 (Moscow: IZOGIZ, 1935), n.p. © 2020 Estate of Margaret Bourke-White/Licensed by VAGA at Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY; image courtesy of Hirsch Library, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston

Yet the key example of Bourke-White’s photography in the context of Socialist Realism appears in a luxury, seven-volume set of books designed by Lissitzky in 1935, titled *Industriia sotsializma* (*The Industry of Socialism*). Constituting a partial return to Lissitzky’s earlier avant-garde practices, the volumes burst with metallic embossing, transparencies, multipage foldouts, cutouts, and page after page of photographs.⁵⁸ Two of these photographs came from Bourke-White: the first depicts an architectural detail of the Dnieprostroi dam, and the second depicts a young worker tightening bolts on a turbine during the dam’s construction (fig. 11). This

second photograph is notable for its wide range of circulation throughout the 1930s, including in Bourke-White’s *Eyes on Russia*, British author H. G. Wells’s two-volume treatise *The Work, Wealth, and Happiness of Mankind*, a pro-Soviet study of the Five-Year Plan by American journalist Louis Fischer, the *Fortune* magazine feature, a *Hartford Courant* newspaper article, and as a print gifted to Sergei Eisenstein by Bourke-White herself.⁵⁹

Every new publication or display of a photograph involves contextual changes that can shape its interpretation, but Lissitzky’s treatment of the turbine shell photograph is unique: by rotating the image ninety degrees clockwise from its usual vertical orientation, the picture plane appears to both spill toward the viewer and rise into the sky in the background. Hand-coloring heightens the realism of the photograph, and retouching of tiny details—the worker’s face, the outlines of individual washers beneath the bolts—helps clarify the image, highlighting the specific steps the laborer performs in service of a much grander goal. Thus enhanced, the photograph becomes a superb specimen of Socialist Realism, passable for inspection by its chief architect and the one-man audience for the deluxe, seven-volume book: Stalin.

In previous issues of *SSSR na stroike*, editors had neglected to include Bourke-White’s name beneath her photographs, or, in the case of the 1932 photomontage, Lissitzky had created a new image from the work of other photographers and placed his own signature in the corner of the composition. Yet in the 1935 book, Lissitzky dutifully credited both photographs to Bourke-White, despite the fact that she was unlikely to ever see or know about this book. Perhaps Lissitzky invoked the name of this non-Russian photographer as a way to expand the collective authorship of the book; after all, foreign declarations of support for the Soviet project were highly valued in the early 1930s.⁶⁰ Lissitzky retained the most international connections of any Soviet artist, so he may have been more willing than others to include (and credit) the work of a foreign artist under the umbrella of Socialist Realism.⁶¹ Once again, Bourke-White’s photographs were available and easily recoded to fit into the latest version of Soviet ideology.

In Conclusion: Russianesque, Americanesque

Returning to the *Dayton Daily* article of May 1930, we can understand how the phrase “Russianesque camera artist” could have referred to a broad range of aesthetic styles. Alternatively, the author may have intended “Russianesque” as a wry commentary on Bourke-White’s perceived political leanings. One of her statements quoted in the article declares: “To attempt artistic expression through forms that have been so well employed in past ages, by masters with rich patrons, is a mistake.”⁶² The journalist may have associated this idea with similar calls from artists in Russia and around the world to establish a new system of artistic production that values the world of industry (and the mechanical medium of photography) above the rarefied domain of past bourgeois patronage and painting.

Another explanation might be found in the realm of film, which was then the medium of Soviet art best known to international audiences. “Russianesque” could have evoked the boldly graphic imagery of films such as Eisenstein’s *Bronenosets Potemkin* (*Battleship Potemkin*; 1925) and Vsevolod Pudovkin’s *Potomok Chingiskhana* (*Heir of Genghis Kahn/Storm over Asia*; 1928). Soon after the article was published, Bourke-White befriended Eisenstein and Pudovkin and later broadcast these connections in the American

press.⁶³ In contrast, only a handful of American observers in the early 1930s might have connected Bourke-White’s photographs with those of Rodchenko, whose radical photographs and related theories rarely circulated outside the Soviet Union.⁶⁴ Yet the newspaper reporter’s probably tossed-off phrase belies the extent to which her work really was Russianesque, in more ways than one.

Regardless of the writer’s intended meaning, these examples make clear that the cultural landscapes of the United States and Soviet Union in the early 1930s left room for artistic exchange, appropriation, and modification, particularly within the medium of photography. By re-reading Bourke-White’s Soviet photographs today, we can see how they fluidly traversed these contexts, perhaps representing an Americanesque vision of Russia as they circulated alongside her name in Soviet contexts. This does not mean she understood or appreciated the work of Soviet photographers, but that her photographs could be molded to fit one of the many stylistic modes representing current Soviet ideology. Mezhericher and other Soviet critics worried about the influence of foreign photographers, such as Bourke-White, but some Soviet editors and artists, such as Lissitzky, were willing to adapt her photographs to their own purposes, no matter her personal beliefs or intent. The ideas mentioned at the outset of this text—of a one-sided coopting of Soviet photographic practices in the West or an alignment of political and artistic convictions between Bourke-White and Soviet photographers—should then be reframed as a multidirectional process of returns, reversals, and reinterpretations. Photographers continued to grapple with the competing forces of state ideologies, professional demands, and personal convictions about art throughout the twentieth century; Bourke-White’s Russian photographs of the early 1930s exemplify the scattered and contradictory objects they left in their wake.

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Notes

In the body of the text, I have followed the Library of Congress system of transliteration for Russian, except where names and words have been conventionalized differently. In the endnotes, I have preserved the spelling used in the original document or finding aid. Translations are my own.

¹ “Beauty in Industry Is Shown by Photographer in Unique Plat Studies,” *Dayton Daily News*, May 26, 1930, 5.

² Parker Lloyd-Smith to Margaret Bourke-White, May 29, 1929, Time, Inc. 1929–1934 folder, box 49, Margaret Bourke-White Papers, Special Collections Research Center, Syracuse University Libraries, NY (hereafter cited as Bourke-White, SUL).

³ Bourke-White returned to Russia a fourth and final time in 1941. See Margaret Bourke-White, *Shooting the Russian War* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1942).

⁴ See Abigail Solomon-Godeau, “The Armed Vision Disarmed: Radical Formalism from Weapon to Style,” *Afterimage* 10 (January 1983): 9; Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, “From Faktura to Factography,” *October* 30

- (Autumn 1984): 118; and Christopher Phillips, “The Judgment Seat of Photography,” *October* 22 (Autumn 1982): 32–41.
- ⁵ For example, see Margaret Denny, “Photographs from the U.S.S.R.: Shifting ‘Eyes on Russia,’” in *Margaret Bourke-White’s Different World*, exh. cat., Margaret Denny and Amy Galpin (Ithaca: Cornell Fine Arts Museum, 2018), 28; and Martin Parr and Gerry Badger, *The Photobook: A History* (London: Phaidon, 2004), 2:123.
- ⁶ Gary Saretzky, “Margaret Bourke-White *Eyes on Russia*,” *The Photo Review* 22, nos. 3/4 (Summer/Fall 1999): 1–14; Barnaby Haran, “Tractor Factory Facts: Margaret Bourke-White’s *Eyes on Russia* and the Romance of Industry in the Five-Year Plan,” *Oxford Art Journal* 38, no. 1 (2015): 73–93; and Ada Ackerman, “Margaret Bourke-White and Soviet Russia,” in *New Perspectives on Russian-American Relations*, ed. William Benton Whisenhunt and Norman E. Saul (New York: Routledge, 2016), 193–211.
- ⁷ Jordana Mendelson, “Episodes, Overlaps, and Dispersals: Revisiting Histories of the 1930s,” in *Encounters with the 30s*, exh. cat., ed. Jordana Mendelson (Madrid: Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, 2012), 15.
- ⁸ This military metaphor is borrowed from Solomon-Godeau, “The Armed Vision Disarmed,” 9.
- ⁹ For instance, see Stephen Bennett Phillips, *Margaret Bourke-White: The Photography of Design, 1927–1936*, exh. cat. (New York: Rizzoli, 2003), 12.
- ¹⁰ See Christian A. Peterson, *After the Photo-Secession: American Pictorial Photography, 1910–1955*, exh. cat. (Minneapolis: Minneapolis Institute of Arts; New York: W. W. Norton, 1997); and Dennis Reed, “Southern California Pictorialism: Its Modern Aspects,” in *Pictorialism in California, Photographs 1900–1940*, exh. cat., ed. Michael G. Wilson and Dennis Reed (Malibu: J. Paul Getty Museum in association with the Huntington Library and Art Gallery, 1994), 67–88.
- ¹¹ See “The Picture on the Cover” and “Thoughts on Pictorialism,” *View Finder* 13, no. 4 (August 1932): 3–4; and *Pictorial Photography in America* (New York: Pictorial Photographers of America, 1926). For background on the PPA, see Bonnie Yochelson, “Clarence H. White: Peaceful Warrior,” in *Pictorialism into Modernism: The Clarence H. White School of Photography*, exh. cat., ed. Marianne Fulton (New York: Rizzoli, 1996), 52.
- ¹² “Factories Her Specialty,” *Rexo Bulletin* 4, no. 11 (November 1929): 5, 40, 42; Bourke-White to Margaret Watkins, March 29, 1928, folder 51, box 3, Margaret Watkins Fonds, McMaster University Library, Hamilton, Ontario, Canada.
- ¹³ Saretzky and Haran both note the vestiges of Pictorialism in Bourke-White’s Soviet photography, but its presence and positive reception alongside straightforward examples of modernist photography is left unexplained. See Saretzky, “Margaret Bourke-White *Eyes on Russia*,” 8; Haran, “Tractor Factory Facts,” 77, 86, 92.
- ¹⁴ Beatrice deLima Meyers to Bourke-White, April 10, 1932, Mer-Mim folder, box 27; Rosemund Gleason to Bourke-White, December 17, 1932, Geo-Gn folder, box 18; Lucille M. Pollina to Bourke-White, February 10, 1933, Pl-Pp folder, box 34; and Mrs. Afron B. Hilton to Bourke-White, March 28, 1934, Hen-Hit folder, box 21, Bourke-White, SUL.
- ¹⁵ J. T. G., “Russia Pictured,” *Cincinnati Enquirer*, January 9, 1932; and James P. Finlay, “Three Books on Russia Reviewed by Mr. Finlay,” *Chattanooga News*, January 2, 1932.
- ¹⁶ Postcard announcement, “Miss Margaret Bourke-White: America’s Outstanding Pictorialist,” March 22, 1933; and Joseph Berman to Bourke-White, December 9, 1931, Professional Photographers’ Club of New York, Inc. folder, box 40, Bourke-White, SUL.
- ¹⁷ Alexander Lavrentiev, “Soviet Photography of the 1920s and 1930s in Its Cultural Context: The Photo Landscape of the Period,” in *The Power of Pictures: Early Soviet Photography, Early Soviet Film*, exh. cat., ed. Susan Tumarkin Goodman and Jens Hoffman (New York: The Jewish Museum, 2015), 58. Also see Olga Sviblova, *Quiet Resistance: Russian Pictorialism of the 1900s to 1930s*, exh. cat. (Moscow: Multimedia Art Museum, 2005).

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- ¹⁸ Boris Skvirsky to Fyodor Nikolaievich Petrov, June 6, 1930, fond. R 5283, op. 3, del. 127 (1), State Archive of the Russian Federation, Moscow (hereafter GARF). An album of these photographs sold at auction. See Boris E. Skvirsky, *Portfolio of Nude Studies*, 1930s, sold in *Photographs*, Sotheby's, London, May 19, 2009, lot 54, <http://www.sothebys.com/en/auctions/ecatalogue/2009/photographs-109780/lot.54.html>.
- ¹⁹ L. Mezhericher, "O 'pravyykh' vliianiiakh v fotografii," in *Sovetskii fotograficheskii al'manakh* (Moscow: Ogonek, 1929), 220–21.
- ²⁰ Mezhericher, "O 'pravyykh' vliianiiakh v fotografii," 243. A copy of this volume appears on the bookshelf in a 1931 photograph of Bourke-White's studio. See "Interior Design Spaces (Margaret Bourke-White's New York City apartment), c. 1940s," box 13, folder 11, John Vassos Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC.
- ²¹ Bourke-White, *Eyes on Russia* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1931), 63–64. Also see "Creative Staff Meeting," February 1, 1933, "Creative Staff Meeting" folder, box 67, Bourke-White, SUL.
- ²² L. Mezhericher, "Chelovek i mashina na snimke," *Sovetskoe foto*, November 1930, 586–88. Also see L. M., "Opyt monumental'noi fotografii v SShA," *Sovetskoe foto*, March/April 1934, 36. For a useful analysis of these articles, see Ackerman, "Margaret Bourke-White and Soviet Russia," 200–202.
- ²³ Nicholas N. Martianoff, *Books by Russians and on Russia* (New York: Nicholas N. Martianoff, 1935).
- ²⁴ Bourke-White, *Eyes on Russia*, 71.
- ²⁵ Margaret Bourke-White, *USSR Photographs* (Albany, NY: Argus Press, 1934), n.p.
- ²⁶ "Soviet Panorama," *Fortune*, February 1931, 60–68.
- ²⁷ "Soviet Panorama," 66.
- ²⁸ George Bernard Shaw, "Red Russia," *Hearst's International Cosmopolitan*, January 1932, 42–45; Julian Huxley, "A Scientist Views the Russian World," *Vanity Fair*, March 1932, 46–47. Also see Paul Scheffer, "Dictators—The Soviet Answer," *Vanity Fair*, September 1932, 34–45, 66; Emil Ludwig, "Stalin," *Hearst's International Cosmopolitan*, September 1932, 34–47; Anne O'Hare McCormick, "Russia Now Laughs," *Ladies' Home Journal*, April 1934, 8–9, 130–32, 135.
- ²⁹ Correspondence with magazine editors further demonstrates that the photographs were conceived primarily as decorative appendages for article texts. For example, see Donald Freeman to Bourke-White, January 30, 1931, and January 6, 1932, *Vanity Fair* folder, box 53, Bourke-White, SUL.
- ³⁰ Margaret Bourke-White, "Silk Stockings in the Five-Year Plan," *New York Times*, February 14, 1932; "Making Communists of Soviet Children," *New York Times*, March 6, 1932; "Nothing Bore the Russian Audience," *New York Times*, March 13, 1932; "Where the Worker Can Drop the Boss," *New York Times*, March 27, 1932; and "A Day in a Remote Village of Russia," *New York Times*, September 11, 1932.
- ³¹ "Postanovleniia STO I Komissii STO po voprosam inturizma o meropriiatiakh dlia razvitiia inturizma v SSSR," 1930, fond. R 9612, op. 2, del. 2, GARF.
- ³² For estimates of the number of American visitors to the Soviet Union and the proportion of Americans to other foreign visitors around 1930, see "Postanovleniia STO I Komissii STO po voprosam inturizma o meropriiatiakh dlia razvitiia inturizma v SSSR"; Peter G. Filene, *Americans and the Soviet Experiment, 1917–1933* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967), 241; and "Tourists to the Soviet Union," *Soviet Union Review*, November 1931, 225.
- ³³ L. A. Block to Bourke-White, September 4, 1932, Soviet Union 1931–1933 no. 1 folder, box 47, Bourke-White, SUL.
- ³⁴ Timothy J. Colton, *Moscow: Governing the Socialist Metropolis* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1995), 163, 267–69.
- ³⁵ Ethel Fratkin to Bourke-White, July 11, 1932, Ethel P. Fratkin folder, box 18, Bourke-White, SUL. See additional parcel post receipts and print orders in I folder, box 23; "Same set buffs + glossies to Intourist July 1932," National Studios Inc., 1932–35 folder, box 32, Bourke-White, SUL.

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- ³⁶ See *Soviet Travel* no. 4 (1932): 6, 9, 13; *Soviet Travel* no. 3 (1933): 29, 33; *Soviet Travel* no. 4, (1933): 33; and *Soviet Travel* no. 3 (1934): 54, 55.
- ³⁷ *Soviet Travel* no. 4 (1932): 6.
- ³⁸ *Soviet Travel* no. 4 (1932): 8–9. *Soviet Travel* would publish Bourke-White's closely similar view of the Kremlin, including the same boat on the river below, the following spring. *Soviet Travel* no. 3, (1933): 33.
- ³⁹ For a concise summary of this rivalry, see Susan Tumarkin Goodman, "Avant-Garde and After: Photography in the Early Soviet Union," in Goodman and Hoffman, *The Power of Pictures*, 22–27.
- ⁴⁰ *Soviet Travel* no. 4 (1932): 12–13.
- ⁴¹ Dan to Bourke-White, undated postcard, Rot-Ry folder, box 41, Bourke-White, SUL. The Ne boltai! Collection contains two of these postcards; a third is reproduced in an auction catalogue. See *Photographs*, Swann Galleries, New York, October 5, 1998, lot 454.
- ⁴² L. Mezhericher, "'U nikh i u nas': Fotootkrytka kak sredstvo bol'shevistskoi informatsii k nashim metstso-tinto," *Proletarskoe foto*, October 1932, 11.
- ⁴³ Bourke-White, *Eyes on Russia*, 22–23.
- ⁴⁴ A typical example is "Girl's Photographs of Steel Manufacture Hailed as New Art," *Washington Post*, June 3, 1928.
- ⁴⁵ Alexander Gumberg to Alexander A. Yazikov, June 26, 1930, Gre-Gz folder, box 19, Bourke-White, SUL; Gumberg to Leonid Petrovitch Serebriakov, June 26, 1930, folder 8, box 4, Alexander Gumberg Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society Archives, Madison; VOKS Registry, May–December 1930, fond. R 5283, op. 8, del. 82 (1), 87, 89, 91, GARF; and Dobin to NKVD, August 16, 1930, fond. R 5283, op. 3, del. 127 (1), GARF.
- ⁴⁶ Skvirsky to Petrov, June 6, 1930.
- ⁴⁷ Erika Wolf, "When Photographs Speak, to Whom Do They Talk? The Origins and Audience of *SSSR na stroike* (USSR in Construction)," *Left History* 6, no. 2 (Winter 1999): 62.
- ⁴⁸ John Stomberg, "A 'United States of the World': Industry and Photography Between the Wars," in *From Icon to Irony: German and American Industrial Photography*, exh. cat., ed. Kim Sichel (Boston: Boston University Art Gallery in association with University of Washington Press, 1995), 19–20.
- ⁴⁹ Bourke-White to Pjatakov, March 6, 1931, Pho-Pj folder, box 34, Bourke-White, SUL.
- ⁵⁰ Bourke-White to Pjatakov, March 6, 1931, Bourke-White to Parker Lloyd-Smith, December 13, 1930, folder 45, box 303, Time Inc. Archive, New-York Historical Society.
- ⁵¹ Erika Wolf, "USSR in Construction: From Avant-Garde to Socialist Realist Practice" (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 1999), 187–88.
- ⁵² Sally Stein, "'Good Fences Make Good Neighbors': American Resistance to Photomontage between the Wars," in *Montage and Modern Life, 1919–1942*, exh. cat., ed. Matthew Teitelbaum (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press in association with Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston, 1992), 132–41, 167–68.
- ⁵³ As David Elliott explains, "Socialist Realism was a method of creation rather than a style," based on "abstract definitions of the kind of political consciousness that art had to reflect." See David Elliott, "Engineers of the Human Soul," in Matthew Cullerne Bown, *Soviet Socialist Realist Painting, 1930s–1960s: Paintings from Russia, the Ukraine, Belorussia, Uzbekistan, Kirgizia, Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Moldova*, exh. cat. (Oxford, UK: Museum of Modern Art, 1992), 13.
- ⁵⁴ Leah Dickerman, "Camera Obscura: Socialist Realism in the Shadow of Photography," *October* 93, no. 102 (Summer 2000): 14–51.
- ⁵⁵ For example, see *Sovetskoe foto*, January 1935, n.p.
- ⁵⁶ *Sovetskoe foto*, April 1935, n.p.

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- ⁵⁷ “Capitalist Party Held Here for Soviet Birthday,” *New York Herald Tribune*, November 8, 1934. The exact lifespan of the photomurals is unknown, but they were likely removed and destroyed well before the consulate closure in 1948. Bourke-White’s far more celebrated photomurals at Rockefeller Center, installed in 1933, were removed in the 1950s.
- ⁵⁸ Peter Nisbet, “El Lissitzky Circa 1935: Two Propaganda Projects Reconsidered,” in *Situating El Lissitzky: Vitebsk, Berlin, Moscow*, ed. Nancy Perloff and Brian Reed (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2003), 224–45.
- ⁵⁹ Julia Older, “Late Shock Trooper in Soviet Russia’s Army of Workers Returns Home to Hartford With Vivid Story of Experiences,” *Hartford Daily Courant*, March 18, 1934; “Soviet Panorama,” 60; Louis Fischer, *Machines and Men in Russia* (New York: Harrison Smith, 1932), n.p.; H. G. Wells, *The Work, Wealth, and Happiness of Mankind*, vol. 2 (Garden City: Doubleday, Doran, 1931), facing 564; and Photograph, c. 1930, fond. 1923, op. 2, del. 2283, Russian State Archive of Literature and Arts, Moscow (RGALI).
- ⁶⁰ See, for example, the VOKS bulletins of 1930 in fond. R 5283, op. 9, del. 56, GARF. Bourke-White submitted her own written version to a collection of congratulatory statements for a special issue of the *Moscow Daily News* marking the anniversary of the October Revolution. See “Tribute from USA Photo Specialist,” *Moscow Daily News*, November 5, 1932.
- ⁶¹ The names in Lissitzky’s address books of the 1920s—the most intense period of his international engagement—belong to German, Dutch, and French artists, as well as several Americans a generation older than Bourke-White, including Katherine Dreier, Jane Heap, and Frank Lloyd Wright. See El Lissitzky address books, undated, box 1, folder 7, series 2, El Lissitzky Letters and Photographs, The Getty Research Institute Library, Los Angeles, CA (hereafter GRI).
- ⁶² “Beauty in Industry Is Shown by Photographer in Unique Plat Studies.”
- ⁶³ For instance, see Helen Gwynne, “Yesterday in New York with Helen Gwynne,” *Hollywood Reporter*, May 1, 1933, 3. Also see Bourke-White, *Eyes on Russia*, 25–26, 69–70.
- ⁶⁴ The few examples of Rodchenko’s work that did appear in exhibitions in the United States by the early 1930s consisted of poster, costume, and set designs. See “Signed List of Exhibitions in Which Alexandre Mikhailovitch Rodtchenko Participated, 1939,” box 1, folder 9, Series I, VKhUTEMAS Collection, GRI and “Polemics in Russian Paintings,” *New York Times*, December 30, 1931. Alfred H. Barr Jr., who would become the inaugural director of the Museum of Modern Art in 1929, had the opportunity to visit Rodchenko’s home and studio during a visit to Moscow in early 1928. The encounter famously overwhelmed him, and he recorded in his diary that Rodchenko had shown him “an appalling variety of things,” including paintings, prints, posters, books, and photographs. See Alfred H. Barr Jr., “Russian Diary, 1927–28,” *October* 7 (Winter 1978): 21.