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Contact: Lawrence M. Kaye (212) 592-1410 (lkaye@herrick.com)
Harry I. Rand (212) 592-1420 (hrand@herrick.com)

The Museum of Modern Art and Heirs of Kazimir Malevich Reach Agreement

The Museum of Modern Art and the heirs of Kazimir Malevich, the Russian artist, announced today that they have reached an agreement regarding the Malevich works that have been at MoMA since 1935. The artist's descendants will receive an undisclosed cash payment and one painting, *Suprematist Composition (1923-25)*, while fifteen works by the pioneering abstract artist — six paintings and nine works on paper — will remain at the Museum.

Glenn D. Lowry, Director of The Museum of Modern Art, said: "It is rare that one can find an equitable solution to such a complicated problem, and I am delighted that we have found one where everyone wins. The Museum of Modern Art can continue to share Malevich's revolutionary work with the public; Malevich's descendants are compensated; and the artist will maintain the major public presence in the West that he strove for during his life."

Lawrence M. Kaye, an attorney for the heirs, also lauded the settlement: "The family is very happy that this matter has been resolved in a way that acknowledges Malevich's legacy and assures the perpetuation of their illustrious ancestor's contributions to the history of twentieth-century art." Clemens Toussaint, the German art historian who has been assisting the heirs, added that the family also plans to establish and endow a foundation whose principal aims will be to support research and scholarship concerning Malevich's works.

Kirk Varnedoe, Chief Curator, Department of Painting and Sculpture, The Museum of Modern Art, said: "These works have a long and wonderful history in The Museum of Modern Art. Malevich's work was all but unknown in the U.S. before, through the efforts of founding director Alfred Barr, it came to MoMA, which has cared for, exhibited, and written about this art."

A long and complex journey brought the works from Leningrad, first to a museum basement in Germany, then to MoMA's Midtown Manhattan galleries in the years before World War II. In 1927, the artist brought approximately 100 of his works from Leningrad to Berlin for exhibition at the prestigious Berliner Ausstellung. When he returned to the Soviet Union, Malevich left his works in Germany with the architect Hugo Haering. But Malevich was never able to get back to Germany and died in Leningrad in 1935. After the Berlin exhibition ended, Haering placed the art with Alexander Dorner, then director of the Landesmuseum in Hannover, Germany, who exhibited it until "degenerate" art was condemned by the Nazi government. At considerable risk, Dorner hid Malevich's works in the museum's basement. In 1935, Barr, travelling throughout Europe in search of works for inclusion in The Museum of Modern Art's upcoming exhibition *Cubism and Abstract Art*, visited Dorner, who took him to the museum basement and revealed Malevich's work. Barr brought some Malevich works back to New York and Dorner sent others to the Museum, which has exhibited them ever since.

In 1993, after the demise of the Soviet Union, the family, with the assistance of art historian Toussaint, initiated the discussions with the Museum that led to today's announcement.

About Malevich's Work

In 1915, after years of experimenting with various styles, Malevich (1878-1935) developed the work for which he is best known, in an austere yet elegant nonobjective style that he would call Suprematism. Working with black and colored geometric forms positioned against a white background, Malevich set out to create an art without allusions to the natural world, that, when most successful, would embody profound spirituality while conveying a modern sense of disembodied dynamism. His art was not always completely lacking in references to the material world, however, and the technological marvels of the day, such as the airplane, were of particular interest to him.

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