

FAMILY KIT BOOKLET

Natalia Goncharova

A Woman of the Avant-garde
with Gauguin, Matisse
and Picasso

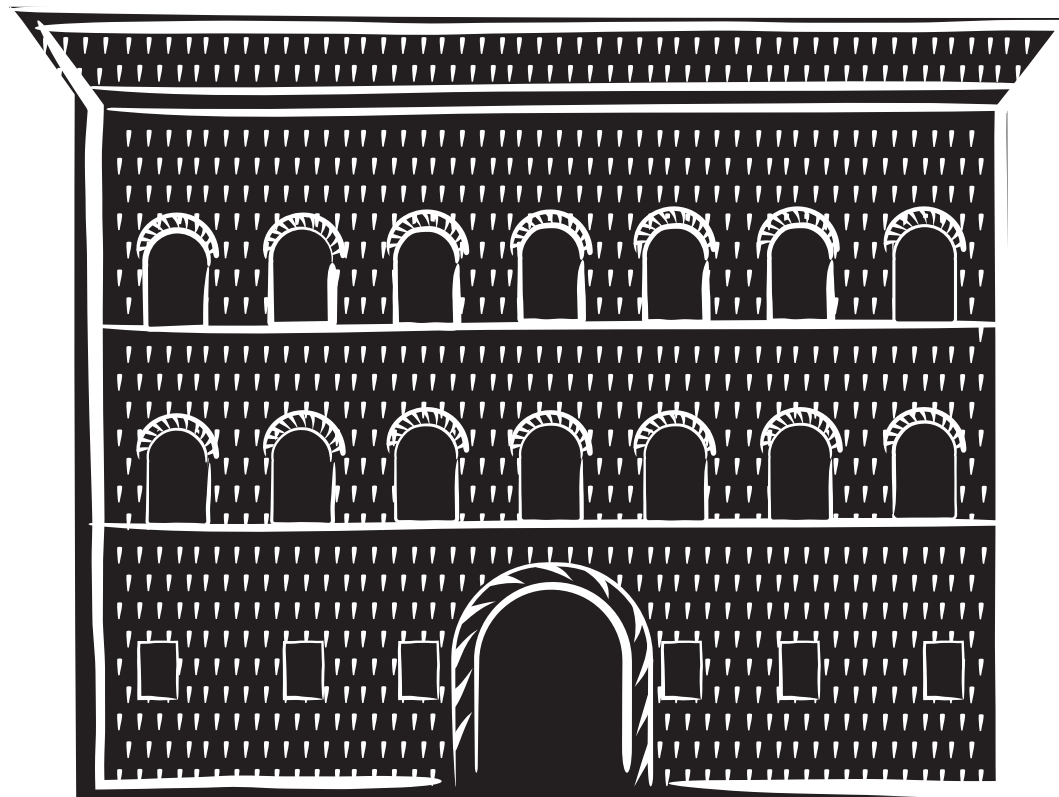


HOW TO USE THE FAMILY KIT

This Kit is a tool for sharing your tour of *Natalia Goncharova. A Woman of the Avant-garde with Gauguin, Matisse and Picasso* with your friends and family.

- ▶ Two or four pages are devoted to each room, with detailed information about the artworks and about activities for you to do together.
- ▶ The book will tell you when to move on to the next room.
- ▶ The artworks we suggest you observe are highlighted in the text.
- ▶ When you use the Kit you may sit on the floor or on the steps under the windows, but please make sure you don't disturb other visitors.
- ▶ Completing all the activities takes about 90 minutes. You can decide for yourself how long you want your tour to take.
- ▶ Remember to stand at a proper distance from the works of art.

WELCOME TO PALAZZO STROZZI



The building you're in is a Renaissance palace that Filippo Strozzi decided to build as his family home in 1489, but today it's used to host art exhibitions.

The exhibition you're about to visit, entitled *Natalia Goncharova. A Woman of the Avant-garde*, showcases her work, the work of her partner Mikhail Larionov and works by other painters who were the sources of their inspiration.

In the course of her life Natalia joined the most forward-looking groups of artists; in fact she was often their only woman member. She used many different painting techniques, made prints, designed costumes for the theatre and fabrics for fashion houses and even illustrated children's books.

The exhibition in Palazzo Strozzi brings together over 130 works of art and period photographs and video footage: it's time for you to go and discover them!

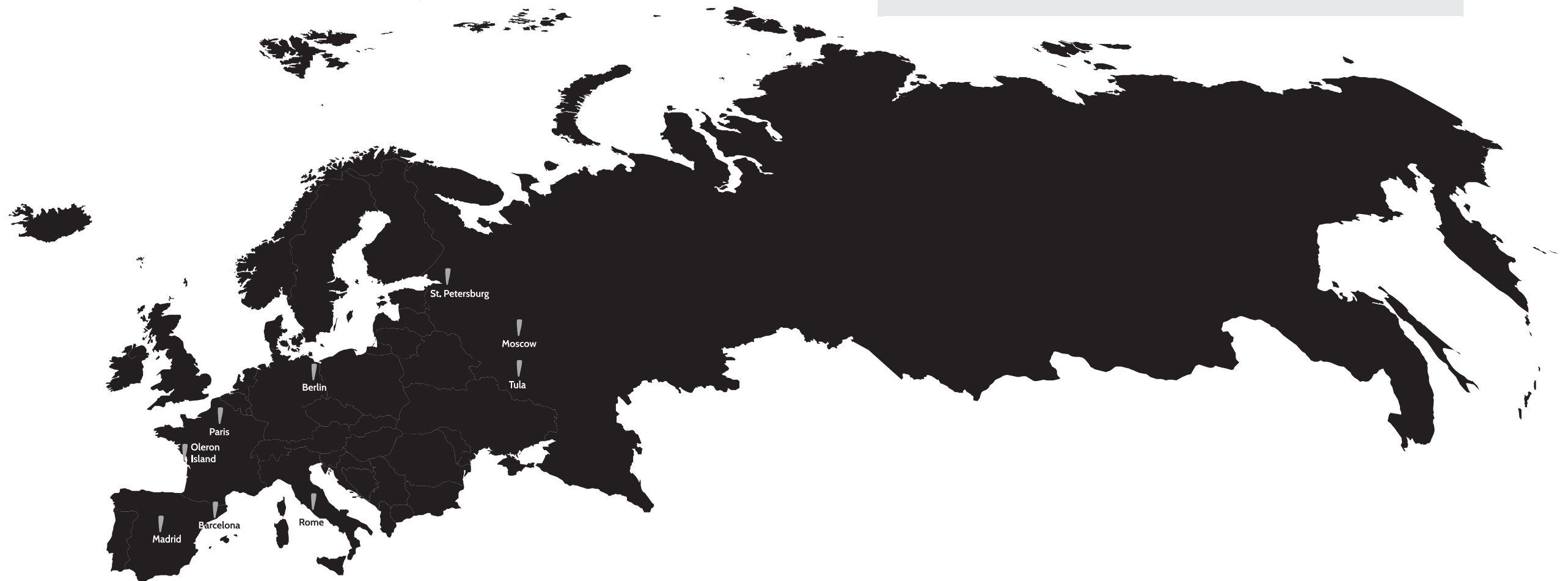
BIOGRAPHY IN PICTURES

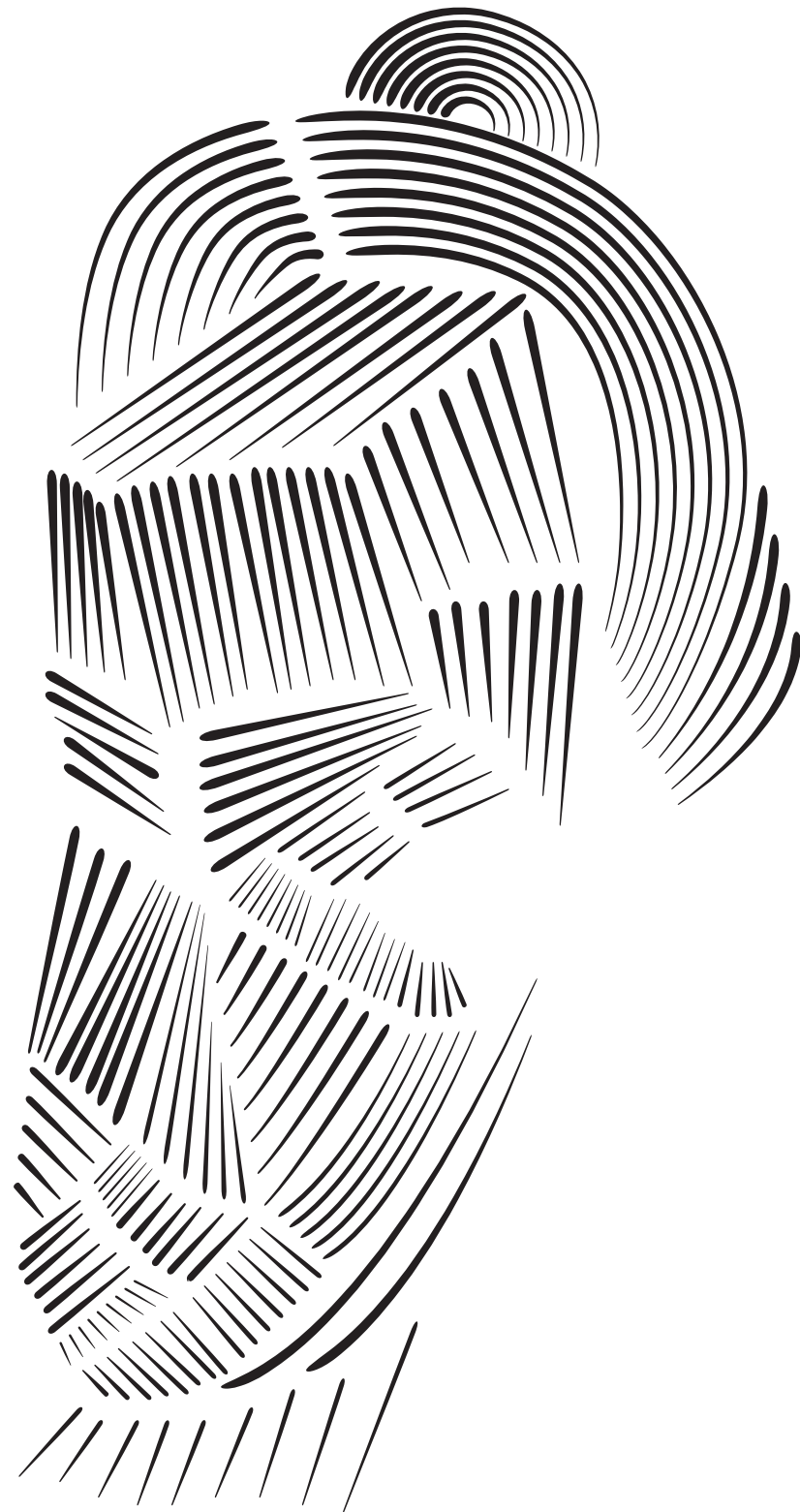
Natalia Goncharova was born in 1881 (the same year as Picasso!) and spent her childhood in the countryside around Tula in Russia, before moving to Moscow with her family at the age of 11.

In Moscow she attended the School of Painting, Sculpture and Architecture where she met the artist Mikhail Larionov, who was to be her partner for life.

They moved to Paris in 1915 and lived there for the rest of their lives, without ever going back to Russia. They painted together, painted each others' portraits and showed their work in several European cities.

The photographs in this room show Natalia at different ages. See if you can find her in each one of the photographs!





LOOKING TO THE WEST

The places she lived, the people she met and other artists' work all gave Natalia ideas for creating new works of her own. She filled whole notebooks with drawings, many of them very quick sketches, and turned everything she saw around her into art!

While Natalia was studying in Moscow, two leading art collectors decided to open their homes to the public and anyone could go there once a week to admire the work of Picasso, Gauguin, Cézanne and Matisse, the most experimental artists of the time.

Let yourself be inspired, like Natalia!

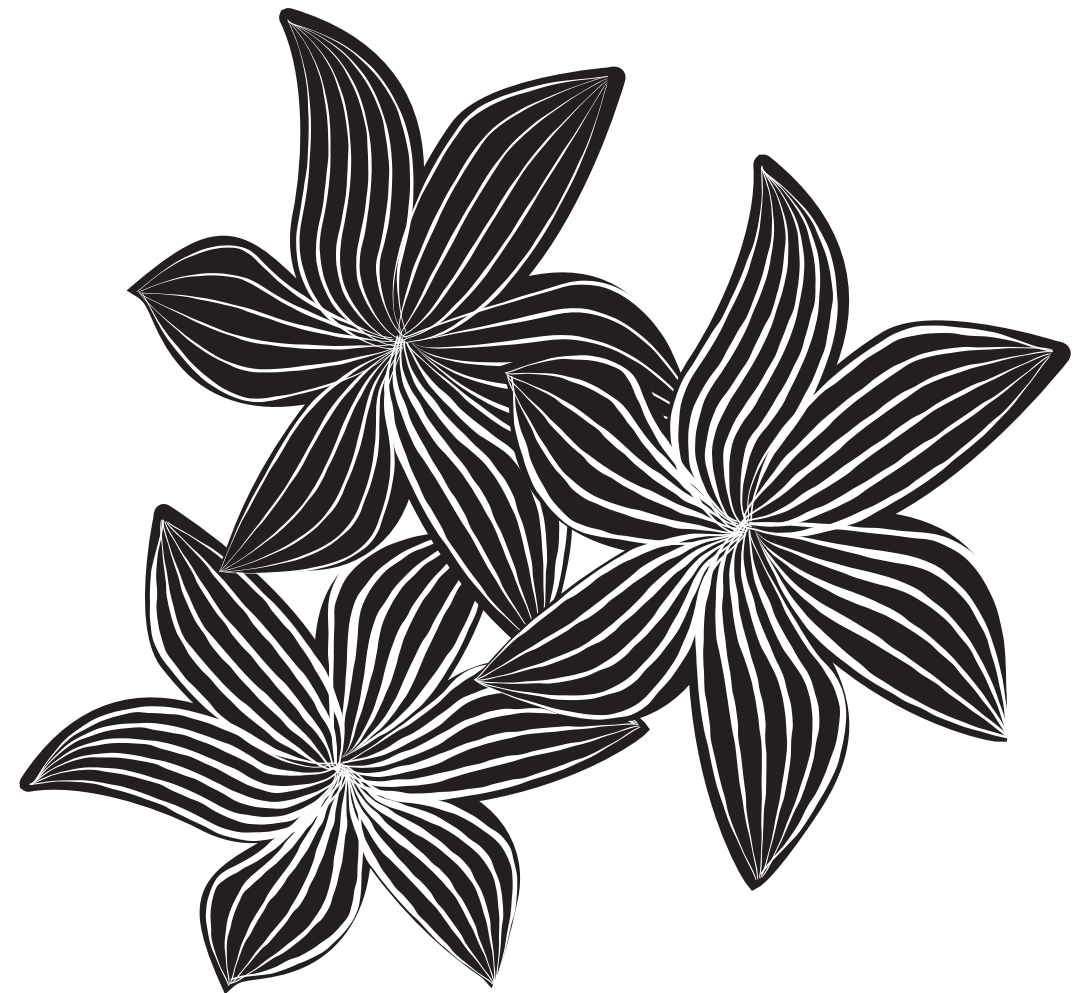
1. Pick out the painting you find most striking in this room.
2. Use the egg-timer to time yourself.
3. Start sketching! You can draw the whole composition or just a detail as long as you capture the painting's basic features.
4. Put your drawing away when the time's up. You can finish it at home, adding new features or changing it into something different altogether.

NATALIA'S RUSSIA

Natalia was born in a small country village in the Tula region where her family owned lands and houses. She spent her childhood there with the farmers who worked in the fields. Even when she moved to Moscow, she went back to her family home in the country every summer to immerse herself in the natural environment that she missed so much in the city.

In the country she'd spend her days with the local women and wear the same traditional costumes as them: a kerchief on her head, an embroidered blouse and a *sarafan*, a long dress with a clinging bodice and a wide skirt reaching down to her feet. These dresses were fancily decorated like the ones you can see in the *Peasant Woman from Tula Province*.

What are the most important places in your life, the places where you spend time together? Is there a special place you associate with your childhood?



THE CYCLE OF THE SEASONS

Life in the country follows the rhythm of the seasons, and there's a different job for each moment of the year: sowing vegetables, pruning the fruit trees in spring, harvesting the wheat in summer, preparing stores in autumn for the cold season or gathering firewood in winter.

Natalia loved the different times of the year and she often depicted country people at work in her paintings.

Try and find the pictures in this room that illustrate life in the country. Can you identify the season each one represents? You can do the same thing in the next room too.

The changing seasons have an impact on everybody's life, not just on the lives of people who live in the country!

Use the next few pages in the notebook to jot down what you do in each season of the year. Choose a different activity for each season.

NOW MOVE ON TO THE NEXT ROOM →

SPRING

SPRING

SPRING

SPRING

SUMMER

SUMMER

SUMMER

SUMMER

AUTUMN

AUTUMN

AUTUMN

AUTUMN

WINTER

WINTER

WINTER

WINTER

1913: ONE-WOMAN SHOW

When she turned 20, Natalia enrolled at the School of Painting, Sculpture and Architecture in Moscow and that was where she met Mikhail Larionov. Natalia, Mikhail and other Moscow artists held art exhibitions and their work proved quite popular, they themselves becoming increasingly well-known as the years went by.

Natalia painted a great deal in this period. She was interested in all kinds of subjects: gardens, flowers, wrestlers, animals, divinities, the seasons and portraits of women. Her style varied enormously. Some pictures were in delicate colours (*Mountain Ash*) while others were very bright (*A Model*); some were painted with rapid, spiky brushstrokes, other with soft, curving lines. Her work often looks as though it's been painted by different artists.

"ALL STYLES
ARE SUITED
TO EXPRESSING
OUR ART"

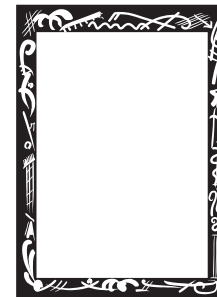
Natalia and Mikhail

LET'S BE SEEN

An exhibition of Natalia's work was held in September 1913 with a huge number of artworks – almost 800! – ranging from included drawings and paintings to wallpaper, engravings, embroidery, fabrics and even patterns for fashion houses*.

A special event was organised in the days leading up to the start of the exhibition, to draw attention to Natalia and to arouse the people of Moscow's curiosity. Natalia, Mikhail and another artist friend painted their faces red and blue, and walked up and down the most fashionable street in the city.

*Pattern = design for a dress



Everyone turned to look at them and news of the exhibition spread like wildfire!

Draw or decorate the mask in the bag using the special blue and red crayon. Now put it on and slowly walk around the room. All eyes will be on you, and some people may even take a photograph of you!

NOW MOVE ON TO
THE NEXT ROOM →



RELIGION

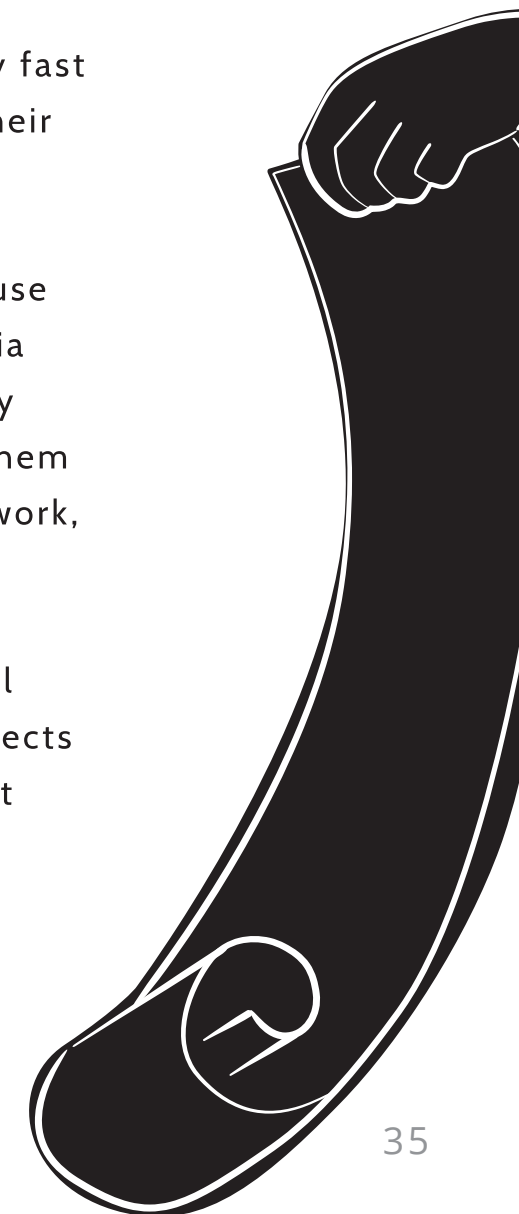
Lubki, which are illustrations accompanied by words used to circulate religious episodes, folk tales and other stories, were enormously popular in Russia in Natalia's day.

Lubki are easy to make. You engrave your picture and words on a wooden or metal support, then spread ink all over it and use it like a stamp.

This process means that you can get several copies of the same image very fast and at minimal cost, which ensured their success and their broad circulation.

Natalia loved these illustrations because they reminded her of traditional Russia with its farmers and its simple country life. She collected *lubki* and showed them in her exhibitions alongside her own work, and she also used them as a source of inspiration.

The religious works in this room reveal her love of these images, but the subjects and styles of her paintings were to get her into trouble with the authorities.



BREAKING THE RULES

When Natalia showed her four paintings called *The Evangelists*, something unexpected happened. The works were confiscated by order of the Russian Orthodox Church and Natalia was reported for breaking the rule that women weren't allowed to paint religious pictures. Only men had that right.

Natalia often broke rules she thought were unfair. When she was studying at the Academy in Moscow, she painted pictures of nude women that caused a scandal and were confiscated by the police. Once again, only men were allowed to paint that kind of picture in Russia!

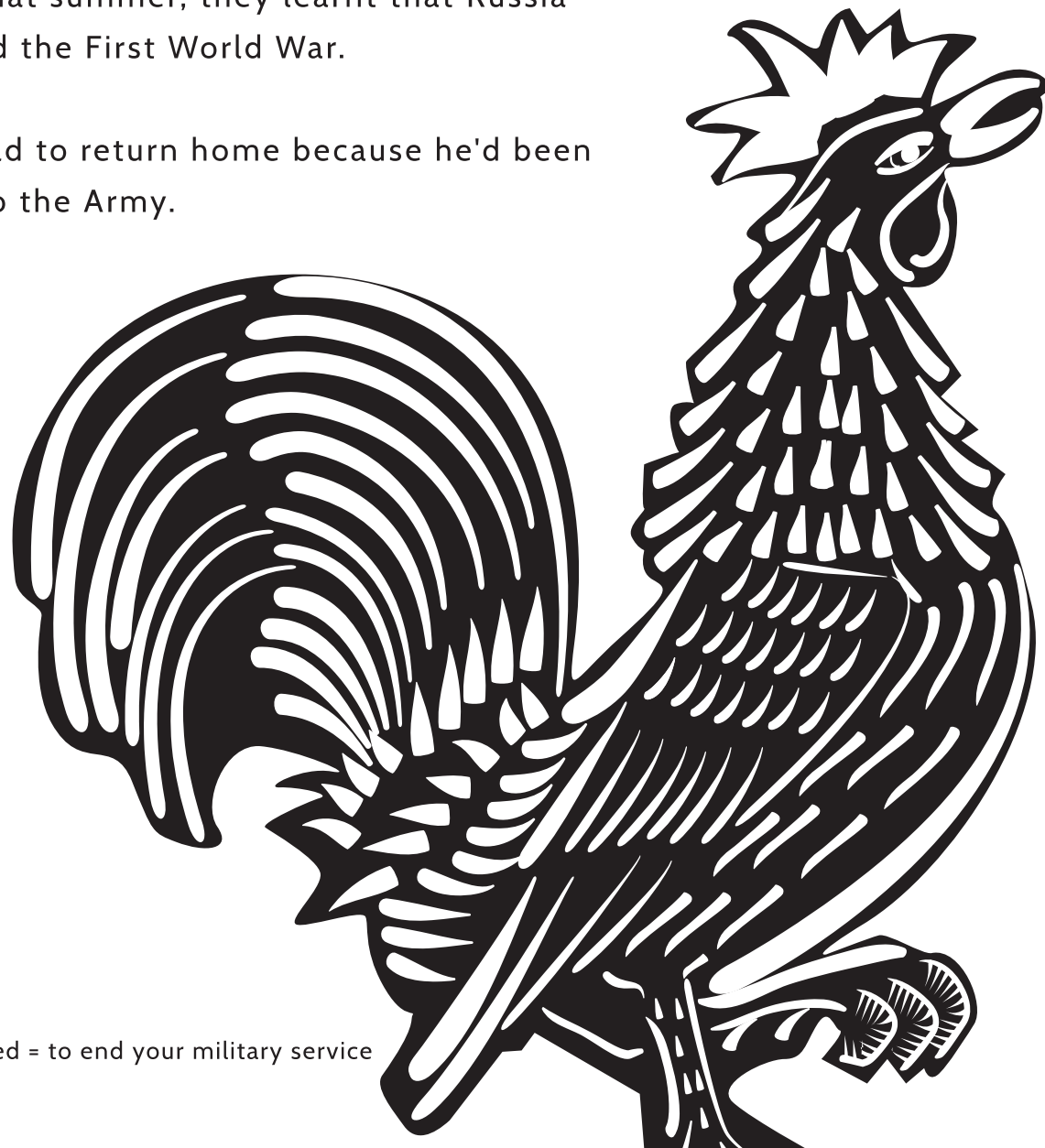


Take the small roll of paper out of the bag, unroll a bit of it and jot down a rule that you'd like to change because you think it's unfair. Now roll it up again and put it back in the bag. By the end of the exhibition we'll have a roll with revolutionary ideas from every family that used the Kit!

THE GREAT WAR

In 1914, Natalia and Mikhail were travelling in Europe. While holidaying on the Île d'Oléron in France that summer, they learnt that Russia had entered the First World War.

Larionov had to return home because he'd been drafted into the Army.



By autumn he was fighting at the front, but he was wounded by a grenade and discharged*.

World War I was one of the most violent clashes in history, involving not just armies but civilians as well. It lasted four years and brought death, injury and destruction to a large number of countries.

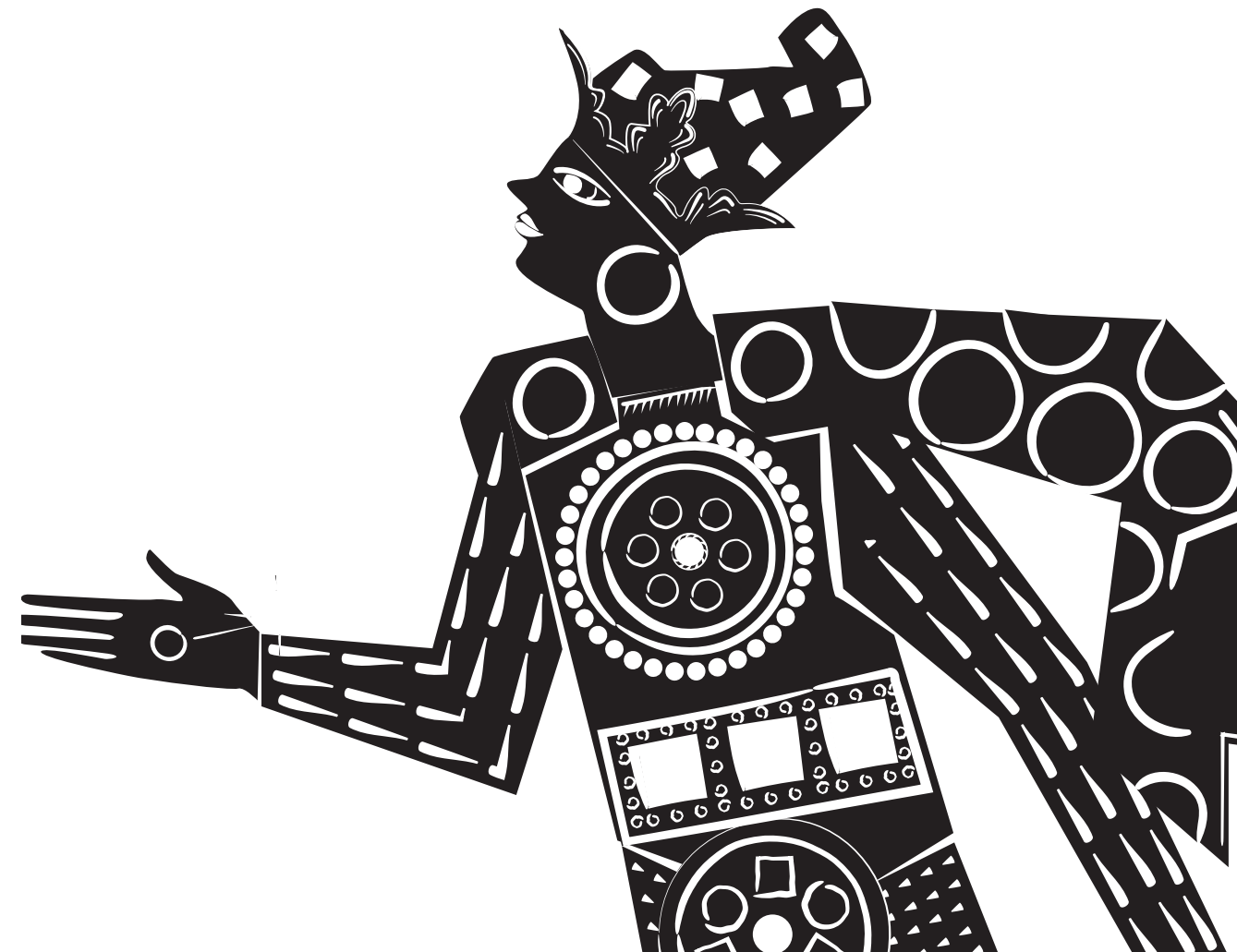
Natalia was struck by the violence and she chose to use symbolic images to depict the war. The countries involved were represented by animals: a lion for England, a rooster for France and an eagle for Russia. Can you see them?

THEATRE

A part of Natalia's work involved the theatre. She worked with the *Ballets Russes* company and helped to create innovative ballet performances that were performed in many cities of the world.

It takes a large team of experts to organise a ballet performance. Some people work on the music (the musicians and the orchestra conductor), others create the sets (the set designer) and yet others design the clothes (the costumier). And then there are the performers – the dancers, walk-on parts, singers and choristers – all of whom are coordinated by a choreographer.

In the *Ballets Russes'* performances the music, dancing and stage sets were all considered equally important and the leading experts in each field were brought in to work on them.



ON STAGE

You're a theatre company. One of you is the choreographer, the other the ballet dancer.

The choreographer has to:

- take the pack of cards out of the bag;
- choose one card for the head, one of the arms and one for the legs;
- give the dancer instructions on what pose to adopt, based on the cards chosen.

The dancer has to:

- follow the choreographer's instructions;
- strike the correct pose and hold it for 10 seconds;
- then start moving in accordance with the style of the character.

What works of art do the cards you've chosen come from? Try and find them in the room!

"SHE REALLY KNEW
HOW TO DRESS
PEOPLE! SHE PAID
A GREAT DEAL OF
ATTENTION TO A
COSTUME'S DYNAMIC
SO THAT IT WOULD
FLOW WITH THE
MOVEMENT RATHER
THAN HAMPER IT"

A dancer

NOW MOVE ON TO THE NEXT ROOM →

MODERNISM

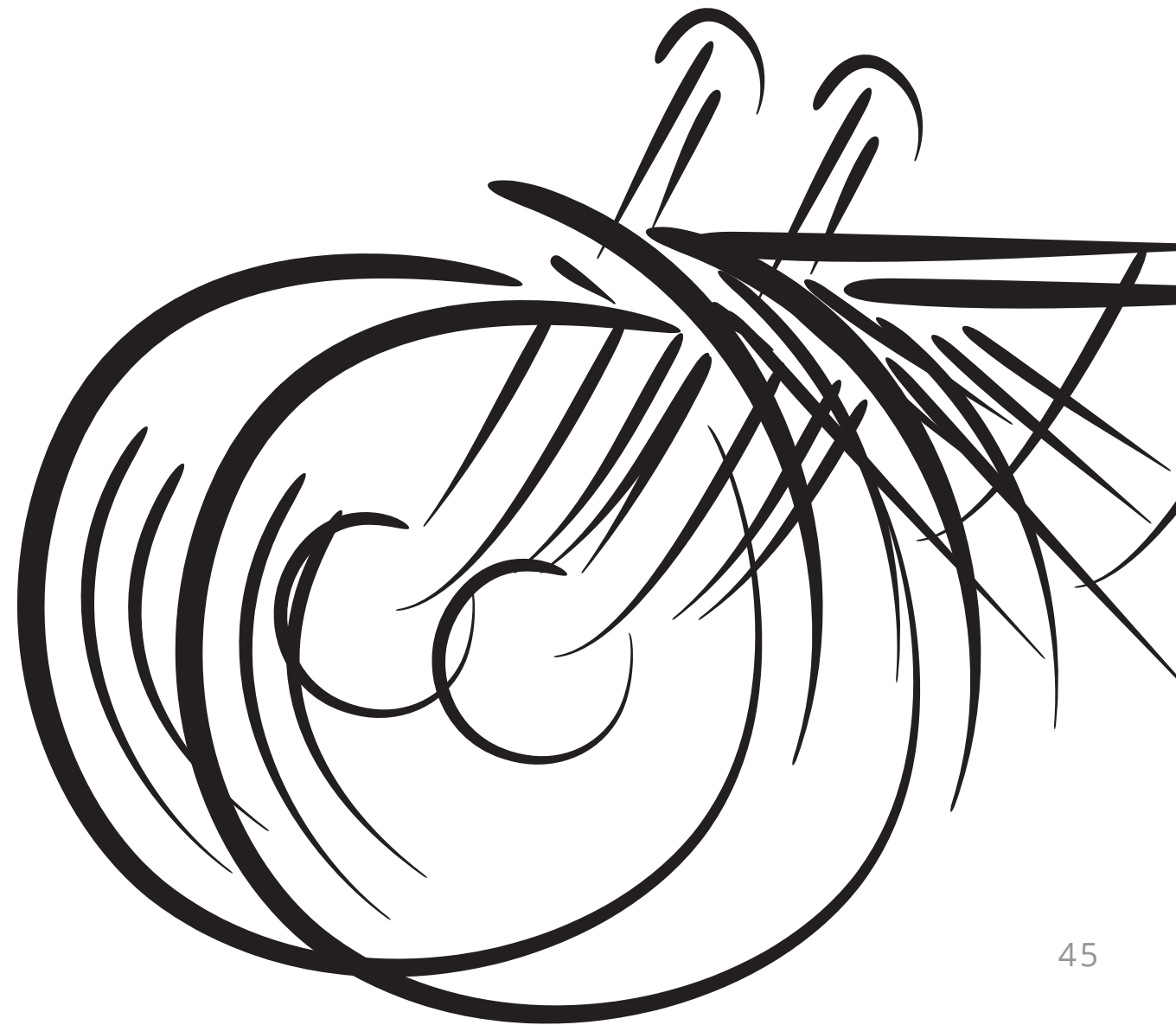
Nature and the countryside weren't the only things that inspired Natalia's art. For a while both she and Larionov took an interest in machines, city life and speed. The things they painted lost their outlines, and it was as though they were penetrated by rays of light to give the impression of rapid movement.

Look at *Rooster and Hen*. Can you make the figures out in the picture?

They're broken down by the light!
Take the kaleidoscope out of the bag and look through it at the people around you.
What do they look like?

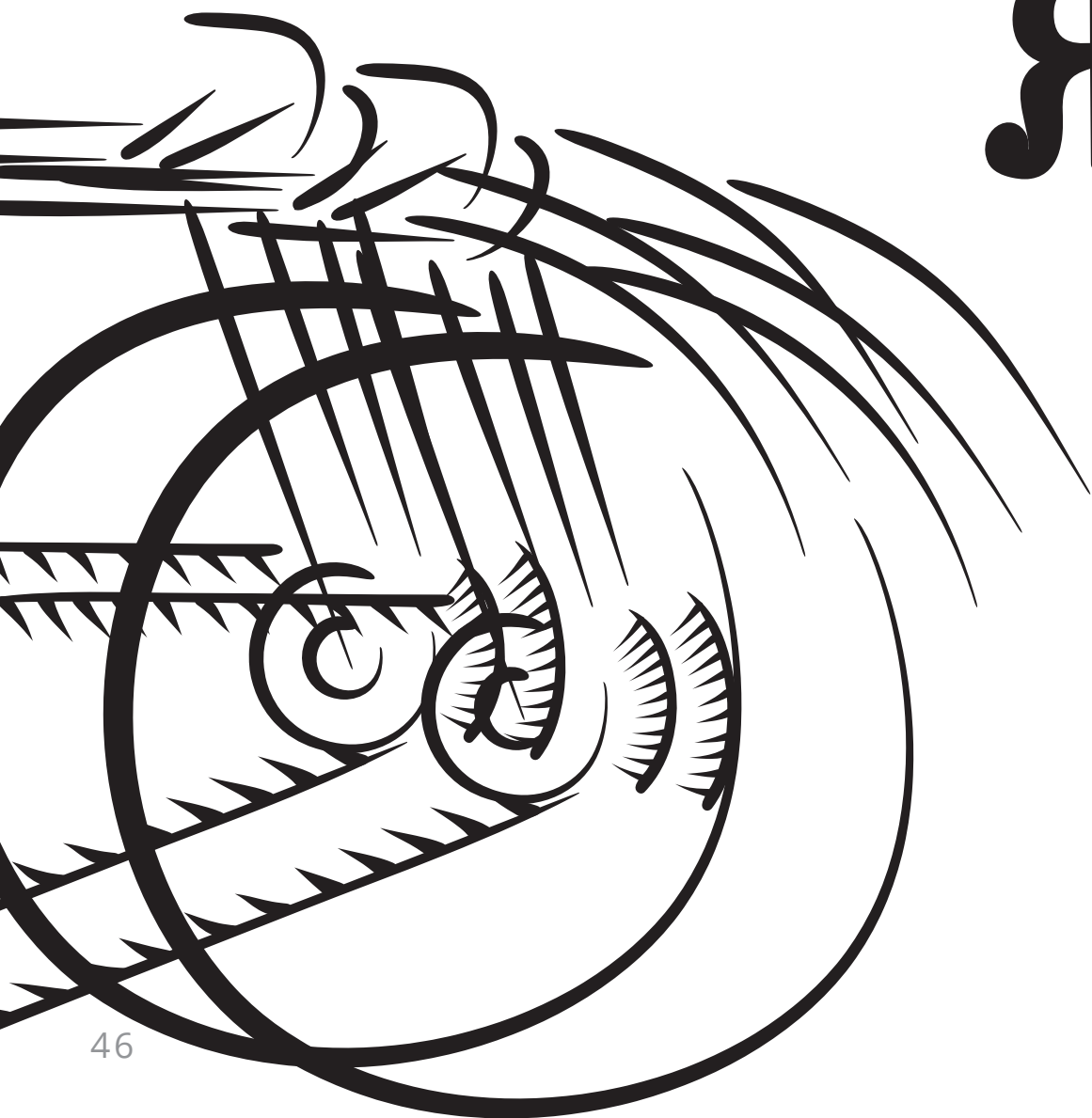
"LONG LIVE OUR RAYONIST STYLE!"

Mikhail



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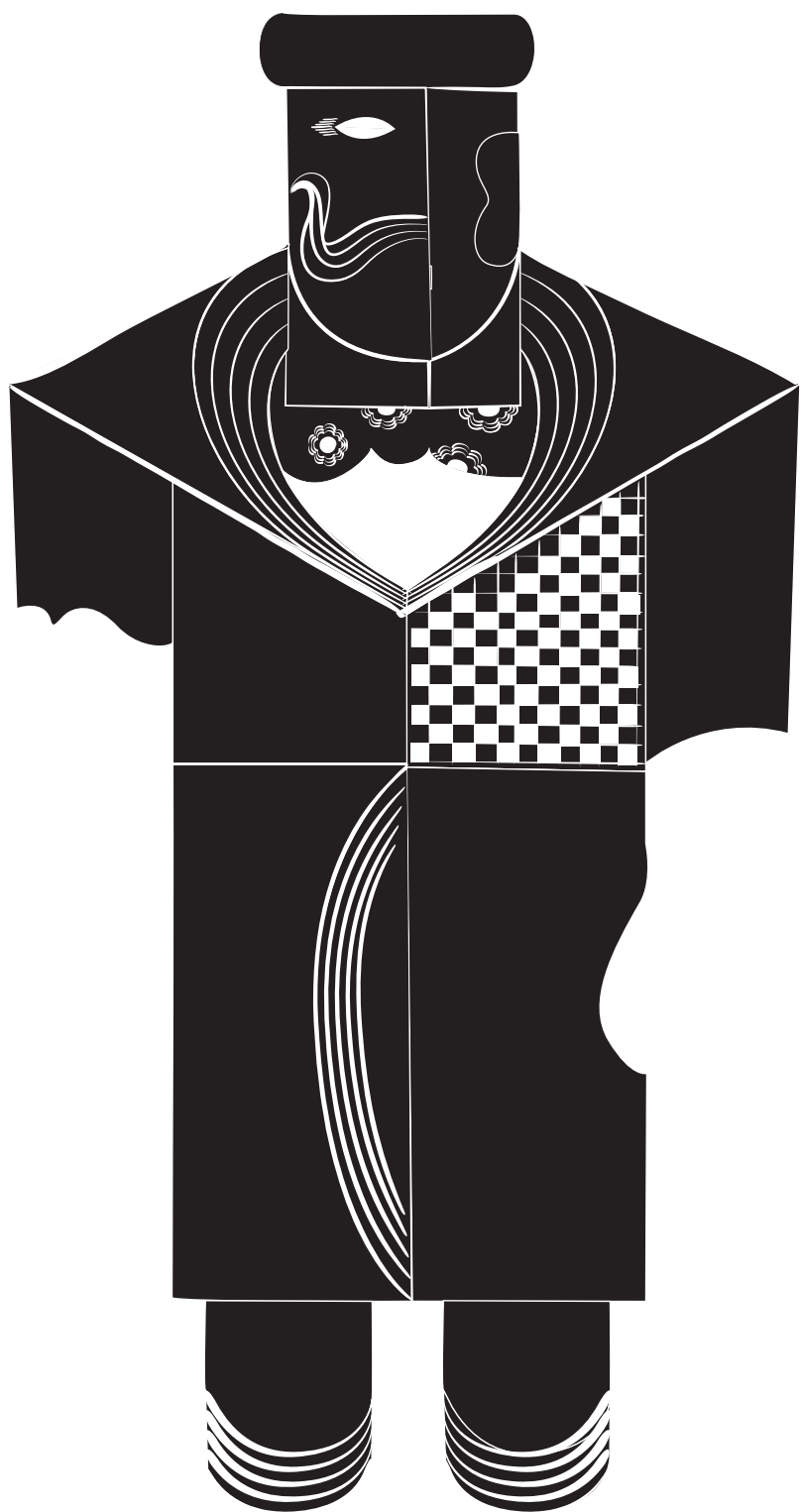


IT'S ALL GO!

Look at the painting called *The Cyclist* and try to find the following things in the background: road signs, shop windows, advertising billboards and the Russian words for *hat*, *silk*, *thread* and *I*. In the foreground, a man on a bicycle is pedalling on a cobbled street for all he's worth.

To convey his movement, Natalia drew his outline more than once and mixed up all the things he encounters, like when you look at the countryside through a car or train window.

Place your hand on a page in the album and draw around it to get its outline. Now move it an inch or so to the left or right and draw it again. Repeat the action three times, and you've got a moving hand! Now do it again, but this time using a different colour for each outline.



GONCHAROVA AND ITALY

In the years when Natalia was astonishing Russia with her art, a group of artists known as the Futurists was forming in Italy with the aim of renewing painting, sculpture and music.

The Futurists believed in, and publicised, their ideas in articles called manifestos in the Italian and international press.

Their manifestos talk about poetry, painting, sculpture, music and even cooking.

The Futurists celebrated everything that was new and rejected the art of the past. They even wanted to destroy museums! They loved speed, cars and everything that symbolised modern life. Natalia met the Futurists and saw their art, which influenced her, but she didn't believe in all their ideas. She saw the traditions and the history of her own country as a major source of inspiration, not as a hurdle standing in her way.



PRIMARY COLOURS AND GEOMETRY

In 1916 Natalia was in Rome where she met Fortunato Depero, a Futurist who also worked in the theatre, painted and produced books.

In the showcase you can see an artist's book bound with a nut and bolt.

Depero loved geometry and sweeping coloured surfaces. In his picture *Synthetic. Architecture of a Man* the image is broken down into coloured shapes, each fragment representing a part of the body or the background.

Depero uses primary colours (blue, yellow and red), contrasting them with complementary colours (green next to red, yellow next to purple) to breathe life into the image.

Go behind the large photograph of Natalia, sit down and take out the bag with geometrical rubber shapes in it. The shapes are the pieces of Depero's painting. Use them to create your own Futurist picture!

NOW MOVE ON TO THE NEXT ROOM →



"IN MY VIEW,
COLOURS HAVE
ODDLY MAGICAL
QUALITIES,

THERE ARE SAD
COLOURS AND
HAPPY COLOURS,
SOFT HARMONIES
AND CALM
COLOURS"

Natalia

AFTER RUSSIA

In the summer of 1916, before moving to Italy for a few months, Natalia toured Spain with the *Ballets Russes* company to work on its performances and to publicise her costumes and stage sets. While she was in Spain, she discovered new colours and began to add them to her work.

She produced a series of paintings on Spanish women (*Spanish Woman*; *Spanish Woman with Fans*) where the colours look dusty; they've lost their vibrancy. Black, burgundy, white, ochre and grey are the dominant colours in which Natalia painted her elongated figures with their traditional long dresses, lace, decorations and fans.

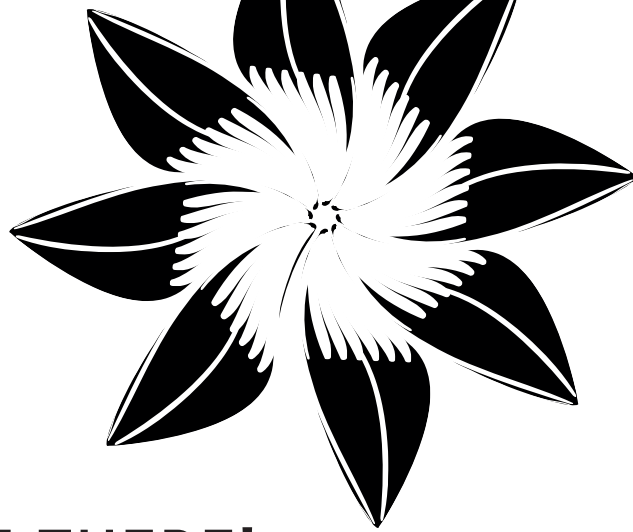


LACE AND FANS

When Natalia was in Spain she was struck by the colours of the women's traditional costumes with their floral decorations, lace fringes sweeping the ground, shawls and ever-present fans.

Take the lace out of the bag and place it between two sheets of wood and the sheet of paper. Using the special orange pen, lightly press down to colour the entire sheet while holding the lace still. This technique, known as *frottage*, allows you to transfer the outline of what lies beneath the sheet onto its surface.

Now create your fan: place the sheet of paper vertically in front of you and make horizontal folds in it. Remember, one fold inwards, the next one outwards, like an accordion. When you've finished, close one side with your fingers and insert the sheet of paper into the wooden handle. Your fan's ready.



WE'RE ALMOST THERE!

During your tour of the exhibition you've seen a lot of stuff and you've discovered that Natalia was:

- ▶ already famous and her exhibitions and pictures were highly valued during her own lifetime;
- ▶ influenced by her home country's traditional art;
- ▶ interested in a wide range of different topics and crazy about vibrant colours;
- ▶ brave and prepared to challenge the established rules;
- ▶ innovative: she invented a new kind of art that mixed painting, engraving and the theatre.

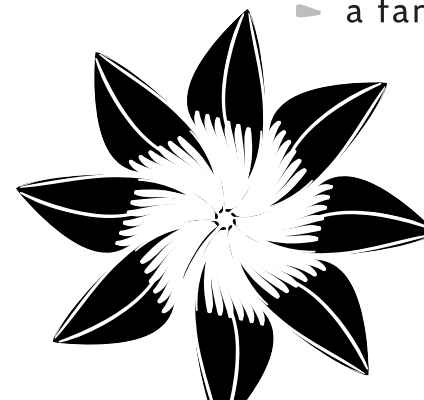


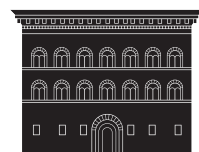
BEFORE HANDING THE KIT BACK

Remember to put everything back in the Kit and to make sure you haven't forgotten anything.

The family Kit contains:

- ▶ a pencil case with coloured crayons and a pencil;
- ▶ a note pad for writing and drawing on;
- ▶ an egg-timer;
- ▶ a mask;
- ▶ a red and blue crayon (in the pencil case);
- ▶ a small roll of paper;
- ▶ a pack of cards;
- ▶ a kaleidoscope;
- ▶ a bag with geometrical rubber shapes in it;
- ▶ a bag with lace in it;
- ▶ a special orange crayon (in the pencil case);
- ▶ a fan handle.





FONDAZIONE
PALAZZO
STROZZI

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