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In *Faster, Higher, Stronger, Comrades!,* Tim Harte examines the interplay between sport, art, and revolutionary ideals in the late Russian and early Soviet periods. Through a detailed and insightful analysis of a wide variety of artistic forms, Harte shows how late imperial developments in sport and physical culture inspired artists "with innovation, revolution, and the widespread belief that such creativity could help bring about not only a better human physique but also a better society" (p. 226). He demonstrates how authors, filmmakers, photographers, and painters stressed the creative, dynamic, and innovative aspects of sports in their artistic endeavors to advance the revolutionary project. By the Stalinist period, however, the demands of socialist realism reduced the scope of artistic and creative license, creating a more static aesthetic that celebrated the elite athlete and the victories of communism.

In the early twentieth century, wrestling and wrestlers became "an enticing prototype for writers and painters" to reshape Russian society (p. 38). Russian writers associated themselves with the popular strongmen of the day, like Ivan Zaikin, who as a world champion wrestler and amateur aviator embodied the strength, vitality, and futuristic outlook that so enamored the avant-garde artists of the revolutionary era. Not all went as far as Aleksandr Kuprin, who became a wrestler in his own right, but other authors, like Anton Chekov, celebrated the physical energy and spectacle of wrestling bouts. Through the work of Kuprin as well as the fiction and films of Nikolay Breshko-Breshkovsky, wrestlers "set the stage for a broader iconoclastic embrace of athletics in Russian literature and painting" in the revolutionary period as "high art merged with low art while tradition was cast aside for the sake of the new“ (pp. 56, 58).

Both primitive and modern, wrestling and bodybuilding became the favored subjects of the neoprimitivists, futurists, and cubo-futurists. Vasily Kamensky also emulated Zaikin and credited Kuprin with revealing the "revolutionary potential" of the strongman in art (p. 108). Through analysis of Natalya Goncharova’s "crude, Neoprimitivist brush strokes, coarse forms, and garish colors," Ilya Maskov’s juxtaposition of classical art forms with his and Petr Konchalovsky’s exaggerated, and largely naked, musculature in his *Self-Portrait and Portrait of Konchalovsky* (1910), and the machine men of Mikhail Matyushin, Aleksey Kruchenykh, and Velimir Khlebnikov’s futuristic opera *Victory over the Sun* (1913), Harte demonstrates how the avant-garde Left used athletic themes to "grapple with convention" (pp. 96, 97). Wrestling formed an important subject of post-1917 art as well, as the
drawings of Aleksandr Rodchenko, plays of Vladimir Mayakovsky, and Kazimir Malevich’s 1920s restaging of _Victory over the Sun_ capitalized on the “massiveness, theatricality, and modern might” of the sport, “transform[ing] the prerevolutionary wrestler into the mechanized ‘New Man’ of the early Soviet era” (pp. 109, 112).

Harte goes on to examine how the rise in popularity of wrestling along with gymnastics, soccer, tennis, and other modern sports coincided with and provided inspiration for the symbolist and Acmeist poets of the 1910s. Aleksandr Blok, Valery Bryusov, and Osip Mandel’shtam “discerned wide-ranging artistic and social ramifications in the blossoming of modern athletics” (p. 59). As sports liberated the body, they also “signaled a newfound freedom and flexibility in Russian verse” (p. 76). In his poetry, Blok sought to express “the ‘muscular’ rhythm of the times,” promoting a “transformation of humanity” into a new “man the actor” (pp. 68, 69). Bryusov brought soccer into "the Russian poetic lexicon, providing an exciting new theme, new vocabulary, and new ethos of ludic iconoclasm" (pp. 75-6). Mandel’shtam “found inspiration ... in the body and all its earthly yet wondrous potential” (p. 76). Harte reveals how sport facilitated the Acmeist break from symbolism, because it allowed poets to celebrate the physical and the mundane and make it the subject of artistic expression.

Sports was active, modern, forward looking, iconoclastic—everything that the avant-garde Left sought for their new society—and artists “exploited the transformative nature of modern athletics” in their quest to create “a new person, a new spectator, a new society, and a new way of life” (p. 95). As Soviet citizens flocked to athletic events and began to participate in _fizkul’tura_ in their military and youth clubs, Soviet constructivists “fus[ed] art and sport,” integrating art into the daily lives of the masses (p. 120). Artists also experimented with new media that better captured the vitality and egalitarianism of the sports movement.

As Harte demonstrates, film, photomontage, and photography grew in tandem with athletics in early twentieth-century Russia, and revolutionary artists sought to harness the “great social and propagandistic value” of these new modes of aesthetic representation to capture the forward movement of sport and advance Soviet culture and society (p. 125). In his _Kino-nedel’ia_ and _Kino-Pravda_ (1922-5) newsreels, Dziga Vertov emphasized “the collective nature of Soviet _fizkul’tura_” with its mass displays of unison gymnastics (p. 129). Lev Kuleshov’s _The Extraordinary Adventures of Mr. West in the Land of the Bolsheviks_ (1924) "brought an athletic vitality and appreciation for the human body into Soviet cinema" (p. 137). Boris Barnet’s _Girl with the Hatbox_ (1926) uses Ilya’s “vigorous athletic exercises” to contrast his upstanding New Soviet Man to the “morally suspect—and unhealthy”—landlord adversary (p. 139). Similarly, Sergey Komarov’s _The Doll with Millions_ (1928) culminates in a running chase through Moscow in which the heroine, Marya, stands out as "an attractive representative of the model, healthy society," outrunning two foreign, "money-grubbing suitors" who seek only her inheritance for which she has no use (pp. 141, 140). Vertov and his brother Mikhail Kaufman also linked sports and physical culture to the dynamism of the new urban landscape through their films. However, whereas Vertov emphasized “collective engagement with modern sports,” Kaufman "stresses the competitive thrust" of industry and athletics in the period of Joseph Stalin’s First Five Year Plan (pp. 151, 157).

Left artists also used photomontage and photography to support state health initiatives and engage the public in the building of the new Soviet society. Harte dissects the work of constructivists, Gustav Klutsis and Vladimir and Georgy Stenberg, who used photomontage in postcards and posters to bring "avant-garde design and athletics [to] the center of the nation's 'new everyday life’" (pp. 181).
With their unconventional images of the muscular new Soviet man and woman, artists captured the idealism and progressive impetus of the era. Furthermore, Harte shows how these new modes allowed artists to continue to experiment even as Stalinism began to circumscribe the scope of creative expression. Photomontage allowed El Lissitzky to expand "the interplay between art, sports, and everyday culture" without abandoning completely the non-objective geometric forms of Suprematism (p. 172). Applying formalist techniques like defamiliarization to their sports photographs, Eleazar Langman, Leonid Smirnov, and Aleksandr Rodchenko could exploit "the ideological pliability of athletics" and temporarily resist authoritarian constraints (p. 182).

While sports became an even more important theme during the Stalinist 1930s, official tolerance of modernist art waned and representations of sport took on the "aura of authoritarian monumentalism" so prevalent in other forms of Stalinist culture (p. 224). Two photographs, one by Ol'ga Ignatovich and one by her brother Boris, highlight how photographers began to adapt to the constraints of socialist realism. Shot from behind, Olga's Start! (1930s) captures the strength, determination, and forward momentum of her female subjects as they begin a race. By contrast, Boris's Youth (1936) conforms to socialist realist demands, depicting "happy, healthy athletes" at their peak of "social—and physical—perfection" (p. 196). While Harte contends that the writer Yury Olesha and the painter Aleksandr Deyneka resisted succumbing to the socialist realist aesthetic, their works show the limited scope for maintaining the creative experimentation of the past. Authorities criticized Olesha's formalism, and Deyneka's later artwork depicted the "fixed, harmonious pseudo reality" required of Stalinist norms (p. 224). Harte contends that while sport-related art ultimately became a pillar of socialist realism by the 1930s, this development was not inevitable. In a coda dedicated to Vladimir Nabokov, Harte uses the émigré writer's own devotion to and literary treatment of sports to show what could have been if the creativity, vitality, and playfulness with which Russian and early Soviet writers treated sports in their lives and work had not been stifled by the politicization of sport and art under Stalin. While the analysis of Nabokov's work is compelling, it seems an unnecessary addition to Harte's very thorough and enlightening examination of late Russian and early Soviet art.

Harte convincingly shows that sports and the art based on it played a vital role in shaping Soviet society during the tumultuous revolutionary period. Examining artistic production in various realms: painting, theater, literature, photography, and film, Harte's analysis is both broad and deep. While his interpretation of the artistic works is insightful and accessible to the non-specialist, the book will appeal most to graduate students and scholars of Russian and early Soviet culture and/or sport.
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