

## RUSSIA

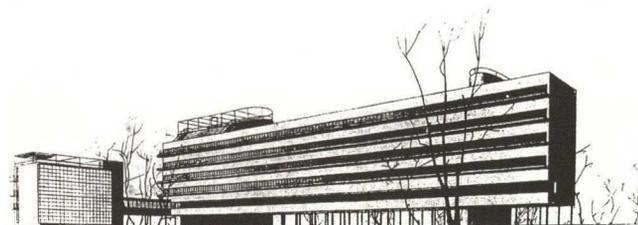
### 20th-Century Heritage

Protection and conservation of the 20th-century heritage in Russia is one of the most complicated and contradictory problems faced by the architectural community. The lack of time 'distance', discord between 'recent' heritage and the traditional idea of a monument, diversity and polarity of opinions regarding restoration (or reconstruction?) treatments, lack of understanding in society – all lead to sometimes insoluble professional dilemmas. However, as in most other countries, 'new monuments' have been identified and were officially listed in the 1980s. Commemorative plaques have been installed, and special services and inspections established. But in many cases reality denies these positive steps.

'Russian Constructivism' with its iconic, world-renowned images is collapsing. Moscow, the centre of Soviet avant-garde architecture of the late 1920s–30s, represents a sad chain of degrading structures. Oblivion, neglect, crude repair, attack of new constructions, legal violation, and mechanical destruction – are not even the full list of factors leading to a hastened demise of a precious layer in the history of 20th-century architecture.

The last decade, with all its complexities of a 'new life' in Russia, marked by its entry to a market economy, brought new realities for recent heritage. The questions of legal status, ownership, territories, new functions and investments have sharpened the situation to its extremity. With a background of intensive new construction, and wide-spread reproduction of previously destroyed monuments and historical structures happening now in the Russian capital, the gradual destruction of Soviet avant-garde is acutely obvious.

The following case examples outline the current condition of several important structures currently at risk, which demand urgent public and professional attention and concern.



Narkomfin housing building. Image of original design

#### Narkomfin housing building, Moscow

*M. Ginzburg, I. Milinis (1928–1930). State listed monument (1987), DOCOMOMO registered.*

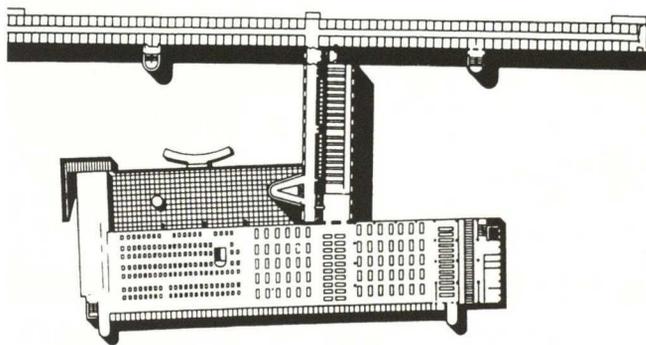
This is one of the most important structures of European Constructivism, belonging to the social and architectural experiments of the late 1920s. The building never changed its function during the last century, and at the present time is practically abandoned. The ground floor is closed, original dining and recreation facilities are much altered. The metal railings of horizontally banded windows are in a non-workable state. Built in economical concrete framing with hollow-pot floors and partly from short-lived building materials, badly maintained during the last decades, it is now in a terribly dilapidated state. Several projects for its renovation

were worked out (some of them on an international basis), but the works never started. Today there is a threat of mechanical destruction of the Narkomfin building, or its rebuilding in new materials. The proximity of the site to the territory of the recently built US Embassy is also complicating the situation.

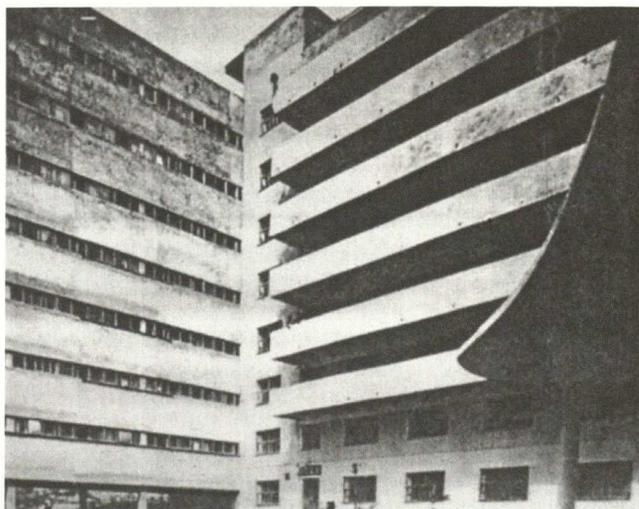
#### Communal House for students of the Textile Institute, Moscow

*I. Nikolaev (1929–1930). State listed monument (1987), DOCOMOMO registered.*

The Communal House is another important structure of Constructivism, which never changed its function through decades, though some of the original ideas of inner space were disfigured. At the time of its registration as a monument, the building was considerably run down, with lost original texture of the surfaces and finishing, especially of the interiors. Currently the house is half abandoned and partly closed for redevelopment by practising architects who are not in the heritage restoration field.



Communal House for the students of the Textile Institute. Original plan and photo from the early 1930s





Club of the Kauchuk factory. Photo from the 1930s.



Club of the Kauchuk factory. New details on the façade of the monument.  
(Photo N. Dushkina)

## Workers' Clubs, Moscow

*K. Melnikov, (1927–1929). Rusakov Club, Club of the Burevestnik Shoe factory, Club of the Kauchuk factory. All are State listed monuments (1987), DOCOMOMO registered.*

The Workers' Clubs are perhaps the most famous structures built by K. Melnikov. To a differing extent, all are now in degraded states. The external and inner repairs undertaken from time to time are carried out without conservation control. The Club buildings have numerous alien alterations. The Rusakov Club has been 'donated' to a famous theatre director and is currently closed. Its 1200-seat auditorium and other inner spaces are in a totally dilapidated condition, though the main stage is used for theatre performances. The process of protracted reconstruction is threatening the authenticity of this monument. Burevestnik Club has totally lost its inner space and is being remodelled for the centre of oriental (Japanese) wrestling. 'European repair' ('evroremont'), as it is called in Russia, has been applied on all the external and inner walls: wooden frames and doors are changed for plastic, clear glass has been substituted by reflecting mirror planes, original ceramics are lost, as well as the texture of all surfaces. Kauchuk Club has been recently transformed into the 'Art centre' with prominent Chinese restaurant facilities and entertainment. Pseudo-oriental, small-scale additions adjacent to the main façade distort the original design and form of this structure, and destroy its image and proportions. The elements of 'evroremont' with the inevitable mirror glass and newly applied finishings are seen on the walls. There is a threat that this building will be sold to Chinese businessmen. This action could bring further and faster destruction of the authentic qualities of this monument.



Rusakov Club. Iconic view of a still structurally strong building. The interiors are in the process of redevelopment.  
(Photo: N. Dushkina)

## K. Melnikov's House-studio, Moscow

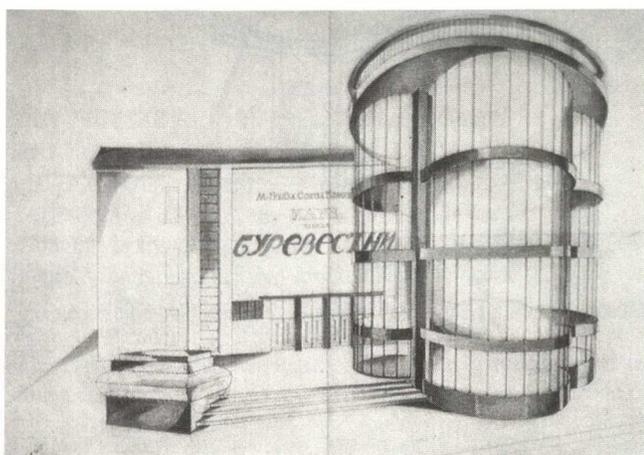
*K. Melnikov (1927–1929). State listed monument (1987), DOCOMOMO registered.*

In private ownership, the building has belonged to the architect's family throughout its history. It is one of the best authentically preserved structures and the only one of that period; it has recently been restored (during the 1990s with a climax period in 1997–1998). However, the restoration work was defective, and the flawed work quickly impacted the state of the monument (leaking floors, cracks in the walls, etc.). New construction around the building is threatening not only the famous visual image of Melnikov's House and its inner space conception, but also destroying the drainage system and, accordingly, the basement. It is planned to open a museum in this building, but unsolved legal questions between the State party and the architect's family are impeding this process.



K. Melnikov's House-studio. Photo before the renovation

New construction threatening K. Melnikov's own House-studio (Photo: N. Dushkina)



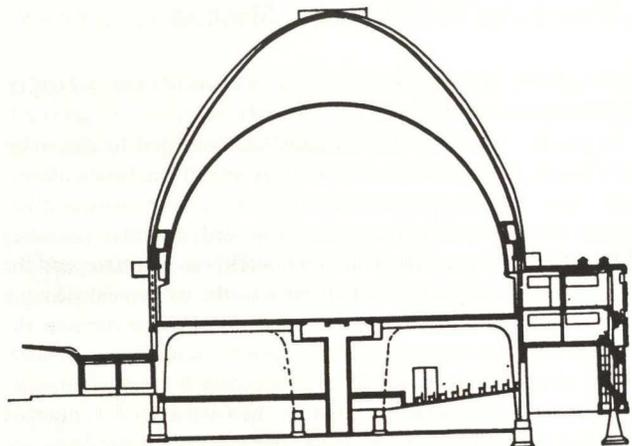
K. Melnikov's House-studio. Image of the original design



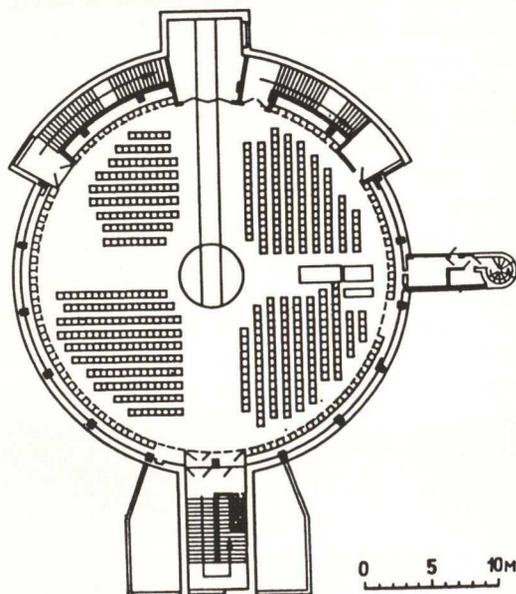
## Bakhmet'evsky Bus Garage, Moscow

*K. Melnikov, eng. B. Shukhov (1926–1927). State listed monument (1990).*

The Bus Garage is the first in the series of garage buildings by Melnikov and one of the best examples of Moscow industrial architecture (54 x 167 metres). Despite a national and international campaign for its salvation, launched in 2000, the building was half destroyed in 2001–2002. Its roof and part of the metal trusses were dismantled. The Moscow authorities are allotting this site for the new construction of a public sporting and cultural centre.



Bakhmet'evsky Bus Garage, Moscow, photos taken from the central newspaper 'Izvestiya', December 2001, calling for salvation of the Garage.

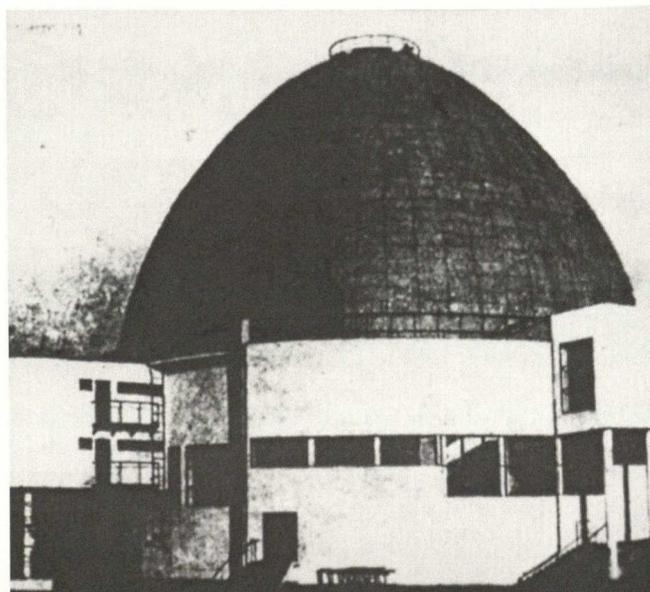


Moscow Planetarium. Images of original design and photo from the 1930s

### Moscow Planetarium

*M. Barsch, M. Sinyavsky (1927–1929). State listed monument (1987), DOCOMOMO registered.*

This was the first Planetarium built in the Soviet Union and is a pioneering work in constructivist architecture, both aesthetically and technically. It has partly lost the original qualities of design and finishing, and the cantilevered concrete entrance canopy has been replaced. It has never changed its function, though during the last decade it has been used for entertainment. Now this quickly degrading structure is closed to visitors. A leading Moscow practising architect has recently worked out a project for redevelopment – the heritage qualities of the Planetarium and its site are ignored in the project. It is planned to dismantle this monument and reposition it on the top of a three-storeyed building, which will be used as a multi-functional complex.





Historical view of the Mayakovskaya Metro Station.

## Mayakovskaya Metro Station, Moscow

*A. Dushkin (1937–1938). State listed monument (1987).*

The station is one of the best metro stations of the late 1930s, belonging to the early period of so called ‘Stalinist architecture’, though its architectonics and structural system demonstrate the last bright splash of Russian avant-garde. This is one of the deepest (52 metres) underground stations, which was used intensively until today without proper maintenance. The last investigation of its hidden construction (1996) revealed practically total destruction of

the ventilation and drainage systems (both of vital importance for underground structures) leading to a strong erosion of the metal skeleton. Currently the station is in a ‘breakdown’ condition, but still heavily exploited. Urgent intervention is necessary to prevent the destruction. However, the existing project for its reconstruction, including the cut-off of a new entrance, does not solve the cardinal structural problems and threats to the authenticity of this monument.

N. Dushkina  
on behalf of the Russian ICOMOS Committee