

The New Criterion

Features

Popova at MOMA

by [Deborah Rosenthal](#)

The photograph of the artist Liubov Popova (1889-1924) in the catalogue of the recent Museum of Modern Art exhibition reveals a young woman with a girlish face. [1] She has round, shiny eyes, and her long neck is adorned with a string of dazzly pearls (or pseudo-pearls) that becomes a phosphorescent glow in this seventy-year-old photograph. In another photograph, taken by Rodchenko in the year she died, her little smile shows us tiny crooked teeth. Her hair, arranged in two curvy wings, flies up on either side of her face like pigtails. Popova seems so very young: something about her face, her expression, suggests qualities of a child— naiveté, innocence, or just plain *earliness*. She looks like an incarnation of the childhood of modern art. Popova, a major contributor to the painting legacy of the early-twentieth-century Russian Constructivist avant-garde, was little more than a name before this exhibition—th ...

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