

'Biennale' Caters to the Intrepid Soul

By Kelly Klaasmeyer

SPECIAL TO THE ST PETERSBURG TIMES

It's Art-O-Rama here in St Petersburg this weekend, but you'd better break out the map, put on your walking shoes, grab a handful of Metro tokens, stuff your pockets with taxi fare or gas up the car.

The ambitious Fourth St Petersburg Biennale Exhibition 'Eastern Europe: New Space' continues through Sunday at widespread venues throughout the city.

The Biennale involves over 250 artists from 26 countries, working in a wide range of media and incorporating over 15 venues, many for performances or temporary works.

The Fourth St Petersburg Biennale is the largest and most wide-ranging to date, although somewhat loosely organized. It admirably encompasses everything from performance art to web sites.

Some of the highlights include:

Smolny Cathedral. Metro Chernashevskaya. 11 a.m. to 6 p.m., 15,000 rubles. The Biennale Epicenter.

Russian artists Andrei Rudiev and Vladimir Grigirashenko make wonderful use of the cathedral space in project "Paket. PG-I." Their work consists of an "army" of life-sized soldier silhouette cutouts tactically placed inside the cathedral and it's dome overlooking the exhibition visitors.

Some stand at attention with their rifles, some observe through binoculars, some fix you in their sights in sniper or guard tower fashion. The faceless figures and their simplified lines feel almost cartoon-like, but their poses are too ominous. The effect wavers between disturbing and comic, intensified by the incongruity of the cathedral interior.

"Superorgan A-1" by Austrian artist Herwig Turk brings viewers to an abrupt halt which seems to include a "Wow, isn't that a three-foot photo of ... No wait, what IS that?"

You can draw your own conclusions, but the initial fleeting impression is of a greatly enlarged photo from a gynecological textbook. The work is actually a digital photograph in which a photograph of an eye is halved and mirrored on the compute.

Much of the painting is underwhelming but Alexei Chistakov is a notable exception. In two untitled pieces from 1995, dense color, physical canvas texture and fluid pigment combine into contemplative and elegant abstract work.

Be sure to check out the Internet projects. UDINA (United Digital Nations) and K. Tenev allow you to create



COURTESY OF THE FOURTH ST PETERSBURG BIENNALE EXHIBITION

'Paket. PG-I' by Russian artists Andrei Rudiev and Vladimir Grigirashenko is one of the exhibits currently showing in the Biennale.

a digital "body" by mixing and matching historical and contemporary body images. Dmitry Pilikin's website offers up a textual and photographic history of St Petersburg organized like a family photo album.

The State Museum of St. Petersburg. 11 a.m. to 6 p.m., 7,000 rubles. History of Photography Section.

"The Echo of Silence," is an exhibit of Belorussian photographers' work about the effects of Chernobyl on their country, and their photographs from the forbidden radioactive zone. Belorussia received 70 percent of the radioactive deposits from the disaster.

Canadian photographer Simon Glass makes his visual comment on the Holocaust in quietly disturbing photographs which place the Hebrew letters for Yahweh (God) over the images of concentration camp dead. A blue filter obscures the corpses, which can only be viewed through the calligraphic shapes of the letters of Yahweh.

Photographers Tatyana Liberian and Oleg Kulik were the victims of the only censorship exercised by the city at the Biennale. Liberian presented a photo series of subtly erotic, but clothed, images. The final image, which was censored, showed a woman's genitals reflected in a mirror. Kulik's re-

maining image shows a man with a crow's beak in his mouth.

The works were removed by Nadya Katson, who was in charge of the space. Explaining the reasoning behind her decision, she said: "The works were clearly some kind of pornography. I have to think about the freedom of my visitors who don't want to look at such things."

Kulik's works were removed because Katson felt they referred to bestiality. She remained unmoved in her decision despite arguments from various artists explaining the conceptual reasons behind the images, and pointing out similar, uncensored images in the exhibition.

To Katson's credit, she did not cover up her action. The empty frames were displayed, bearing the note: "The works of this artist have been removed by the management of this exhibition hall for reasons of censorship."

The Municipal Cultural Center, 41 Nevsky Prospect, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. 5,000 rubles. Danish exhibition.

Kirsten Dufour's "Quo Vadis," is a series of 12 colored plastic boxes. Inside each box is a bronze of the head of a newborn baby. Two small speakers are placed on opposite sides of the box, in "ear" fashion. The sound of tiny heartbeats come from the speakers, which

link all the boxes together in umbilical fashion. Make sure the gallery attendant turns on the audio. (As at many of the sites, audio and video get turned off, so if you see cords or blank screens, go bug a babushka).

The Exhibition Hall at Novy Passage, 57 Liteiny Prospect, fourth floor. Lithuanian exhibition.

Irma Balakauskaite's drawing series "Exodus," with its loosely and whimsically drawn images is quite nice. In one work childishly rendered figures with arms outstretched in sleepwalker fashion, circle endlessly around a globe bearing the word "exit."

Vidmata Ilciukas' black and white series of photographs "Stairway I-V," transform the traditionally grungy and urine-scented apartment stairwell into a thing of spartan beauty. Close-up shots of elegantly lit corners and edges highlight the textuality of innumerable coats of plaster and paint and end up looking like some prehistoric archeological site.

A closing Biennale Rave will be at Spartak Cinema Saturday night. On Sunday, a Biennale performance by "New Fools" will be in Virtsu outside of St Petersburg. For intrepid souls trying to find the performance, Dimitry Shubin, art director of the Biennale, said, "Meet at Vitebsky Vokzal at noon."

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Concert venues

GLINKA PHILHARMONIC CHAMBER HALL

Nevsky Prospect 30; Tel. 312-45-85

GLINKA CAPPELLA

Naberezhnaya Reki Moika 20;

Tel. 314-10-58

MALY (MUSSORGSKY) THEATER OF OPERA AND BALLET

Ploshchad Isskustv 1; Tel. 314-37-58

MARIINSKY THEATER OF OPERA & BALLET (KIROV)

Teatralnaya Ploshchad 1;

Tel. 114-52-64 (Booking office),

114-12-11

RIMSKY-KORSAKOV MUSICAL THEATER CONSERVATORY

Teatralnaya Ploshchad 3; Tel. 312-25-19

SHOSTAKOVICH PHILHARMONIC

GRAND HALL

Mikhailovskaya Ulitsa 2; Tel. 110-42-57

HERMITAGE THEATER

Dvortsovaya Naberezhnaya 34;

Tel. 311-90-20

SMOLNY CATHEDRAL

Ploshchad Rastrelli 3/1; Tel. 271-76-32

Drama theaters

AKIMOVA COMEDY THEATER

Nevsky Prospect 56;

Tel. 312-45-55

ALEXANDRINSKY THEATER

(Pushkin Theater), Ostrovsky Ploshchad 2;

Tel. 315-44-64

BOLSHOI DRAMA THEATER

Naberezhnaya Reki Fontanki 65;

Tel. 310-04-01

KOMISSARZHEVSKOY DRAMA THEATER

Italianskaya Ulitsa 19;

Tel. 315-53-55

THEATER ON LITEINY

Liteiny Prospect 51;

Tel. 273-53-35

MOLODOY ZHNY THEATER

Naberezhnaya Reki Fontanka 14;

Tel. 316-68-70

OTKRYTY THEATER

Vladimirovsky Prospect 12;

Tel. 113-22-07

• See Pages 17-18 for entertainment listings.