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The Moscow Times
ARTS & IDEAS

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on view

A Tycoon's Treasure Trove

Businessman Vladimir Semenikhin opens a private museum to show off his extensive art collection.

By Marina Kamenev
Published: March 2, 2007

Moscow construction magnates aren't usually known as great supporters of the arts. But Vladimir Semenikhin, owner of the construction company Stroiteks, took a step toward changing that reputation last week when he opened Russia's first privately owned exhibition space for contemporary art.

The two-story exhibition space on Ulitsa Kuznetsky Most is now open to the public. Named the Yekaterina Cultural Foundation after the nonprofit that Semenikhin started with his wife in 2002, it will show works from their extensive collection of more than 500 pieces, along with projects organized with museums and other collectors.

The first exhibition in the new venue, titled "Motion, Evolution, Art," features 75 works from the Semenikhins' collection. Its opening on Feb. 20 was meant to coincide with the run-up to the Second Moscow Biennale of Contemporary Art, and the biennale's head organizer, Iosif Bakshtein, was on hand to thank the Semenikhins for their contributions to the Russian art scene.

"We are not just witnessing a great collection of the 20th century, but a collection that is important in the world of Russian collectors," Bakshtein said. "This museum is the future for private collectors in Moscow, and it has a vital role in the second biennale in drawing attention to Russian art and culture."

Vladimir and Yekaterina Semenikhin began collecting art in the early 1990s, and started the Yekaterina Cultural Foundation as a means of displaying their collection and, more broadly, supporting the arts in Russia. In 2005, they collaborated with the Tretyakov Gallery on "The Knave of Diamonds," an exhibition focusing on the influential pre-revolutionary circle of painters



Sergei Nikolayev / Vedomosti
Semenikhin stands under Oleg Kulik's "Cosmonaut" at the opening of the Yekaterina Cultural Foundation.

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20th anniversary with its founder, Anatoly Vasilyev, in self-imposed exile.



When Men Wore Wigs

By Tom Birchenough
A Frenchman visits 18th-century Russia in the historical swashbuckler "Servant of the Sovereign."



Image

By Alexander Osipovich
In his 2005 canvas "Mao and Marilyn Monroe," Shi Xinning juxtaposes two of the best-known cultural icons of the 20th century.

best-known cultural icons of the 20th century.



Wanted

By Kevin O'Flynn
Pavel got into the business after finding a listening device in his office.



Salon

By Victor Sonkin
My opinion is that someone who knows the general plot and ideas of "The Aeneid"

or "Beowulf" is better off than someone without a clue.



In the Spotlight

By Anna Malpas
It's hard to define Lyube's musical style. But you could call it vertical-of-power rock.



Calendar of Events

Concerts Opera Dance Theater Gigs Exhibits

that included Mikhail Larionov and Natalia Goncharova. Last year, the State Russian Museum in St. Petersburg drew heavily on the couple's collection of nonconformist works for the retrospective "Times of Change: Art of 1960-1985 in the Soviet Union."

Speaking at the opening, Semenikhin declared that part of the reason he had opened the venue was the shortage of quality exhibition space for contemporary art in Moscow. "[Places] do exist, but they are in such a state that an exhibition can be canceled at any given moment," he said. "You can plan an exhibition for a long time, and then the galleries just pull out."

With galleries abroad, meanwhile, Semenikhin has faced the opposite problem. "They only work within a three- to five-year timeframe, which means to set up an exhibition, the earliest you can get it out is in three years," he said. "Having this space means we don't depend on these other organizations."

"Motion, Evolution, Art" showcases parts of the couple's collection that have not yet been shown to the general public. The result is an eclectic show that spans the years 1916 to 2006 and covers numerous styles and periods. Curator Alexandra Kharitonova admitted that the exhibition's theme was broad. "Our purpose was to display the most interesting, most dynamic and brightest pictures from [the Semenikhins'] collection," she said.

As visitors reach the second floor of the renovated Art Nouveau-style building, they are greeted with Oleg Kulik's grinning "Cosmonaut" suspended from the ceiling. The sculpture is one of several attention-grabbing 3D works by contemporary artists, including Philipp Ramette's "Levitation du Chaise #1," a chair held up in space by a rope, and Tony Matelli's lifesize chimpanzee, who stands on a crutch in the middle of the room, his leg cut off and his body pierced with a variety of weapons and tools. The work is aptly titled "Fuck'd."

Many of the artists address the theme of Western influence on Russian culture. Sergei Bugayev-Afrika's "Flag #28" has Donald Duck embroidered on a Soviet-style banner under the motto "Workers of the World, Unite!" Alexander Kosalapov's bronze sculpture "Mickey and Minnie: The Worker and the Kolhoz Woman" also references Walt Disney, placing the heads of Mickey and Minnie Mouse onto the bodies of Vera Mukhina's famous 1937 sculpture. Leonid Sokov's "Encounter of Two Sculptures" quotes slightly more sophisticated imagery, with a statue of Lenin depicted walking toward a man crafted in the trademark style of Alberto Giacometti.

Semenikhin hopes his example will inspire other collectors to open exhibition spaces -- perhaps with government support. "Maybe in the future there will be some kind of government initiative for foundations like our own," he said, "to encourage private collectors to share their art with the rest of Russia."

"Motion, Evolution, Art" (Dvizheniye, Evolyutsiya, Iskusstvo) runs to April 1 at the Yekaterina Cultural Foundation, located at 21 Ulitsa Kuznetsky Most. Entrance from Ulitsa Bolshaya Lubyanka. Metro Kuznetsky Most. Tel. 621-5522.

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