

I HOPE PAVILION

April 4, 2007

Коммерсантъ[®]

Yesterday Kommersant learned details of the Russia's participation in the forthcoming 52nd Venice Biennale of Contemporary Art – it will open in the early June. The names of Russian artists participating in that oldest and most authoritative art festival will be announced by Olga Sviblova, the pavilion curator, only on April 26.

With I Hope Motto

The list of participants expected since November 2006, the time of appointing Olga Sviblova the curator and Vassily Tsereteli the commissioner, was approved in the early March 2007.

The lower hall will be provided to AES group working with Ms. Sviblova for a long time, that has switched from computer-processed photos to 3D animation, and to Andrei Bartenev, showman-designer, who has recently been mastering the sound-emitting sculptures. The Shower installation by artist Alexander Ponomarev will be placed in the upper hall. The former sailor has converted his initial trade into a contemporary art format and amazes the public with his watery attractions – something like a submarine surfacing by the Kamenny Bridge in the downtown Moscow. In Venice the artist is going to literally make waves: his long-time project with a water reservoir oscillating at the beck of an invisible demiurge will be expanded and augmented – the wave will possibly overflow the pavilion balcony and reach the Venice Lagoon. This sight is also supposed to have a metaphorical meaning – in the next hall Mr. Ponomarev jointly with Arseny Meshcheryakov, a popular Moscow publisher (WAM Publishing house), is going to place a multi-screen installation centering on the “information noise”. A giant wave in the artists' concept is supposed to sweep away the extraneous information with something like windshield wipers in a car.

The entire exposition will be named Click I Hope, pursuant to the title of Julia Milner's interactive installation. Her name is impossible to hide, since even now on Web site www.clickihope.com the announcement of her participation is posted.

Ms. Milner's work will be in the form of an enormous plasma screen placed as a shield at the entrance to the Russian pavilion. The “I Hope” phrase will be projected in all conceivable languages of the world and the Biennale visitors touching the screen will be able to join on the Web the like-minded people using the same language while computer counters will show the growing and falling degree of hope in the world. It is a paradox but Julia Milner's name is the only one unknown to critics.

But the entire team of artists will be announced only on April 26. Most likely, this is connected not only with the information blackout that the project participants comply with surprisingly well. It seems that up to the last moment it is not clear whether it will be possible to finance the



quite ambitious program also requiring an exact coordination of actions by authors of various project elements and a certain reserve of time which is running very short. In any case, Olga Sviblova, the pavilion curator, refusing to share the project details and suggesting that they should wait until the official press conference, said: “The project is planned as a quite complicated and fund-intensive, we wanted at last to present Russia as a high-tech contemporary country and not just a supplier of mockery and rubbish. It requires money which we are now seeking and, I hope, will find thanks to the help of the Cultural Agency and private individuals. We have a plan B for any eventuality.”

Senator Answers Click

It is evident even now that the three million rubles allocated by Roskultura Agency will be not enough to realize the concepts. Vassily Tsereteli, the pavilion commissioner, said that Senator Sergey Gordeyev will help with the project. He is ready to participate in restoring the pavilion itself which is the Russian architecture monument, a building designed by Alexei Shchusev, famous architect. Such readiness has been confirmed to Kommersant by Mikhail Vilkovsky, Executive Director of Russian Avantgarde Cultural Heritage Preservation Foundation established by Senator Gordeyev. The Senator became a celebrity in March last year when he acquired a part of another architectural monument, Melnikov’s House in Krivoarbatsky Lane. Russian Avantgarde also owns Alexei Shchusev’s archives, in other words, the pavilion in Venice is quite in line with its collection.

The building decorated in neo-Russian style resembling the Tretyakov Gallery façade has needed overhaul for long time. “There are fungi there, plaster is falling off here, many problems are with the roof,” Mr. Tsereteli complains. But while the pavilion is owned by the Foreign Property Management Department under the Presidential Administration, Roskultura Agency cannot commence any work there. According to Alexander Zavolokin, Deputy Head of the Art Department in Roskultura Agency, the Agency still hope to succeed in getting this historic building under its wing and in starting overhauls within the year, but it is unclear whether the pavilion will be ready for the International Architectural Biennale planned for the next year just as it is unclear who will become its commissioner. Vassily Tsereteli’s time in office is about to expire and they have no idea yet in Roskultura who will take his place.

But an interest in the fate of the Russian pavilion has been expressed by the American Guggenheim Foundation. Its European representative Nicolas Ilyin confirmed to Kommersant that Guggenheim has “common interests” with Senator Gordeyev. “We are interested in the activity lines of the Foundation he has organized. We have shown to Senator Gordeyev the exhibition in Bilbao, went to Abu Dhabi with him, introduced him to contemporary architects, discussed the feasibility of joint projects. We are providing him with the logistic support, friendly assistance in repairing the Russian pavilion – it should not look like a barn.”

According to Nicolas Ilyin, Clemente di Tieme, famous architect, who restored Peggy Guggenheim’s collection building in Venice and the



American pavilion at the Biennale, has been involved in the job. Replying to the Kommersant question how it is possible to start repairs while the building is not owned by Roskultura Agency, Mr. Ilyin said that it was bad when the roof leaked and added that he knew for sure that the overhauls would start right after the Biennale of Contemporary Art closed and it should be completed by the fall next year, in other words, by the opening of the Architectural Biennale: “As for who will be the commissioner by then, you better ask Roskultura – it is not us who appoints them.” 

