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RESISTANCE Hundreds of anti-war demonstrators gathered on the Field of Mars in central St. Petersburg on Sunday in a rally authorized by City Hall. Unlike last week's unsanctioned protest near St. Isaac's Cathedral, the event attracted little in the way of pushback from supporters of Russian intervention in Crimea. See story, page 2.

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Sculptor Weaves Magic From Refuse

A fashionable display of thousands of aluminium cans bring together beer, royalty and opera.

By Lana Matafonov
THE ST. PETERSBURG TIMES

When it comes to fashion, some women are willing to wear anything as long as it looks good — even if it's aluminium cans. "That is definitely the most popular question I get asked," says Nikos Floros, a Greek sculptor who is in St. Petersburg for the first time to showcase his work. "Women want to know if they can wear my sculptures. So far only one woman has, a model wearing a corset from coke cans for the Vienna Opera Ball at the request of the event director. I don't know if I would allow this again for any one else, even a pop star — not even Lady Gaga or Madonna...even if they kneel in front of me," he says laughing.

Wearing an outfit from aluminium cans may sound absurd at first but Floros' dramatic sculptures are created in such a way that you could be forgiven for easily mistaking the dresses to be made from fabric — such is the intricacy and precision of his work.

Now, after a six-month showing in Moscow's Tsaritsyno State Memorial Estate, where an estimated four million people are said to have visited, Floros' exhibition has arrived at the Museum of the Academy of Fine Arts for one month

only. Titled "Tribute to Maria Callas and Grace Kelly," Petersburgers have an opportunity to admire up-close Floros' retrospective work dedicated to the "aura, soul and charm" of legendary opera singer, Callas, and the American actress-turned Monaco princess, Kelly.

"Both of these women were great personalities of the arts who inspired many others. Both of them also left their mark in history and both had a tragic death. In addition, both were friends in real life. It's these factors that make them special to me," says Floros before adding, "I feel they also both embody the three basic principles of Hellenism: strength, beauty and harmony."

Hand-cut, twisted, woven and shredded, Floros' technique with the aluminium is immediately impressive. While his collection, which includes a series of dresses, handbags, shoes and gloves, may not be to everyone's taste, you can't help but appreciate the work behind it — especially the grand sculpture inspired by the wedding dress worn by Kelly for her marriage to Prince Rainier of Monaco. Created specifically to commemorate the 30th anniversary of the death of the princess, the remarkable dress took four years and over 4,000 diet coke cans to create — cans that Floros collected himself from factories and restaurants, and still does today.



From a distance, the tight aluminum weaving creates an illusion that Floros' sculptures have been made from fabric.

"When I start, I don't have a clear idea on how it will be," says Floros, explaining his creative process. "I have heard this from many artists too, that when they start, they don't have a clear idea on the finished product and finally the work itself dictates how it wants to be done."

The idea to work with beer and soda cans came from a supermarket visit 12 years ago. Noticing the way the light reflected off the cans lined across the shelves, Floros decided to incorporate the same effect in his work. "Aluminium is also the metal of this century — I consider this to be the aluminium-era and I want to use contemporary materials for my work," he says.

What followed was a year of experimenting with the material before he completed his first sculptures. Now on average, Floros works 12 hours a day — in silence. No TV, no music, and definitely no drinking, except maybe green tea (for the record, Floros doesn't drink beer or soft drinks). "It's like meditation, like a trance," he says. "You have to be careful working with this metal; you need to concentrate as

you can get many cuts. It's dangerous," he adds. However, a quick glance at his blemish-free long delicate hands suggest he has mastered his technique after all these years.

Patenting his method in 2003 as "Florosart," Floros' unique work quickly gained attention across the international stage. Now based in New York, his sculptures have since been exhibited in some of the world's best museums, and along the way he has been honored with a number of awards and invitations to contribute his work to special events, including the anniversaries marking the death of Callas and Kelly.

"It was fate that I was meant to work on Maria Callas' anniversary and then asked to work on Grace Kelly's anniversary since they were also such close friends. My next aim is to capture Princess Diana — also another tragic destiny," he says. "First Maria Callas to Grace Kelly, and then Grace Kelly to Princess Diana — these women were all connected by a friendship."

While Floros' current exhibition has been touring the world, including the U.S., Austria and Monaco, Russia's

tour is the first to exhibit a new piece by the sculptor — a mosaic portrait of Catherine the Great. Made up of thin interwoven pieces of aluminum, the project took approximately three months to complete and eerily captures the queen's face. "It was like a puzzle," says Floros. "I would add one piece, step back, look, then add another piece. I hope to do more work like this in the future."

Other future plans for Floros include recreating the sculptures of the Parthenon Marbles, currently found at the British Museum — a project which he estimates will take two years to complete.

"You can love or hate my work but you cannot ignore it because there is something unique about it," says Floros. "What I do is so difficult. You have to be crazy to do what I do," he says with a laugh. Crazy, perhaps, but also incredibly patient, dedicated and talented.

"Tribute to Maria Callas and Grace Kelly" is on until Apr. 6 at the Russian Academy of Fine Arts Museum. For more information, visit: www.nimrah.ru



Intricate detailing complete the accessories inspired by Princess Grace Kelly.

Venice Film Festival Arrives in St. Pete

Italian film takes center stage at local cinema.

By Tatyana Sochiva
THE ST. PETERSBURG TIMES

The third From Venice to St. Petersburg festival kicks off at the Velikan Park cinema Friday to introduce local moviegoers to a selection of Italian movies from the official program of the 2013 Venice Film Festival.

The annual "From Venice ..." festival was first organized by the Italian Cultural Institute in Moscow five years ago. It has since been held for three years running in St. Petersburg, thanks to the efforts of local Italian Cultural Institute. This year's program of this year includes five feature films and four documentaries, all of which will be screened in Italian with Russian subtitles.

"Compared with previous programs, this year 'From Venice to St. Petersburg' will offer viewers more documentaries, which are acquiring an increasingly important role in Venice due to the way they erase the boundaries between fiction and documentary cin-

ema," said Director of the Italian Cultural Institute of St. Petersburg and Cultural Attache at the Consulate General of Italy in St. Petersburg Redenta Maffettone.

Among the films scheduled for St. Petersburg are the dramas "First Snowfall" by Andrea Segre and "A Street in Palermo" by Emma Dante, and the comedies "A Lonely Hero" by Gianni Amelio and "Zoran, My Nephew the Idiot" by Matteo Oleotto. Documentaries from Venice Classics section "Bertolucci On Bertolucci" by Walter Fasano and Luca Guadagnino, "Prophecy, Pasolini's Africa" by Enrico Menduni, "Neorealism. We Were Not Only Bicycle Thieves" by Gianni Botstsakki and the first documentary film to win the Golden Lion award at the Venice festival "Sacro GRA" by Gianfranco Rosi, will all be screened. A screening of the drama "Hands Over the City" by Francesco Rosi will close this year's event.

"The inclusion of 'Hands over the City' at the festival is a tribute to the great director who created this film in

1963 to expose real estate speculation in Naples during the economic boom in Italy," said Maffettone. "That same year, Rosi received the Golden Lion for the best film screened in competition. Fifty years later, the 2013 festival opened with a screening of this masterpiece of Italian cinema. We have decided to show this film at the closing of the festival in St. Petersburg because the plot of the film remains relevant to this day."

In addition to the raft of Italian films, actress Anita Caprioli is expected to visit St. Petersburg for the opening of the festival, where she will present "First Snowfall," in which she starred.

The International Exhibition of Cinematographic Art of the Venice Biennale, as the film festival is officially known, is the oldest international film festival in the world. In 2013, it celebrated its 70th anniversary.

The third From Venice to St. Petersburg festival runs from Mar. 14 to 18 at the Velikan Park movie theater, 4/3 Alexander Park, M: Gorkovskaya. Tel: 676 6151.

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