

## SILICON ALLEYS



## Exchange Rate

**THE BIG TENT** Part of the exchange project is a large (40-by-48-inch) photograph by Robin Lasser and Adrienne Pao titled 'Ms. Yekaterinburg: Camera Obscura Dress Tent @ the Church-on-the-Blood, Yekaterinburg, Russia.'

*A unique exchange brings  
Russian artists to San Jose  
for sister-city photo project*

By **GARY SINGH**

**L**AST JUNE, I found myself at the corner of First Street and San Fernando in downtown San Jose observing two folks as they took photos of the entire intersection. They seemed to be shooting the Knight-Ridder building, a few restaurants and the potted plants.

Later that evening, while attending an artists' reception in the San Jose city manager's conference room on the 17th floor of City Hall, I found out they were two Russians—Denis Tarasov and Sophia Nasyrova—participating in an unprecedented sister-city

photography project between San Jose and Yekaterinburg, Russia.

Three American photographers, Robin Lasser, Adrienne Pao and Brian Taylor, spent seven days in Yekaterinburg in May. In return, Tarasov and Nasyrova spent a week in San Jose in June. Both Lasser and Taylor are faculty members at SJSU, while Pao is an SJSU graduate from the photo department.

Results of the project, "Yekaterinburg and San Jose Through the Eyes of One Another," are now displayed both in the City Windows Gallery along Fourth Street at City Hall as well as at the Metenkhev House Photo Museum in Yekaterinburg. What's more, the U.S. State Department and the Bilateral Presidential Commission have commissioned a book and film to highlight this project. If everything went as planned at

presstime, a reception went down last Tuesday at City Hall, replete with Russian TV crews.

Lasser says she originally received an email last October from the U.S. Consulate's office in Yekaterinburg, inviting her to participate in the project. Since her grandparents on both sides were from Russia, she jumped at the opportunity. She and Pao had previously collaborated on "dress tent" projects, unique fusions of wearable architecture and performance art, where human subjects sport gigantic tentlike dresses that relate to the specific landscape, so she enlisted Pao, along with SJSU photographer and historian Brian Taylor, to join her in Russia.

"It's been an amazing journey," Lasser said. "We must have sent thousands of emails back and forth. ... But the Russians were incredible in how much energy and research and what they put into this project."

The Americans went to Russia for one week and stepped into a media circus. They received extraordinary press coverage. Everyone in Yekaterinburg knew of the artists'

presence. Ms. Yekaterinburg, the equivalent of our Miss California or something similar, showed up and performed with the dress tent. The U.S. Consulate General's office staged a contest on Facebook where people locally could vote for the Russian photographers who would get the chance to visit San Jose. The Consulate General himself sat on the committee to choose the winners.

When Tarasov and Nasyrova showed up in San Jose, graduate photography students at SJSU became their guides 24/7, taking them out and about. They went to places like Mare Island and Hangar One at Moffett Field.

"We tried to take them to places we thought there would be some shared history," Lasser said. "We took them to places where Russians, in the past, would never have had access."

As a result, several proofs, artist statements and even a video are all on display in the City Hall Windows Gallery. Tarasov, in particular, framed his project around the romanticism of espionage through his experiences at Mare Island and Moffett Field: "I am endlessly fascinated with peeking through a hole in the wall, peering around a corner or looking over the fence to steal a glimpse of secret objects."

Due to the success of this project, other exchanges have emerged: A poetry exchange is scheduled to take place this fall. IT workers from each city are making visits. The consulate general's office also brought on three "e-interns" from SJSU as the newest members of its team in Yekaterinburg. ZERO1, the architects of the 01SJ Digital Art Biennial, are currently engaging with the Ural Industrial Biennial to figure out how the two might potentially collaborate.

And why not? This is precisely what should be taking place in 2011. Exactly 100 years ago, the Russian Modernist painter Wassily Kandinsky developed a well-documented correspondence with the composer Arnold Schoenberg that is still discussed today. I feel like we have entered a new era.

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