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Penis Protest Rises to Greet Economic Forum

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People standing in front of the raised Liteiny Bridge, with a giant penis painted on it, in St. Petersburg on Monday.

ST. PETERSBURG — Radical artists painted a giant protest penis on a drawbridge in central St. Petersburg ahead of an international economic forum, police said Wednesday.

Measuring 65 meters long and 27 meters across, the light-colored phallus rises and glistens against the imperial-era capital's elegant skyline when the bridge is drawn up to let ships pass in the twilit northern summer nights.

Artists from the politically minded art collective Voina, or War, said they drew the graffiti on Monday to protest the heightened security measures expected at the St. Petersburg International Economic Forum, which opens Thursday.

Unsanctioned political art or public messages in the form of graffiti and painting are extremely rare in Russia.

"We have painted a giant phallus to show what the FSB and Interior Ministry are doing in terms of security for the forum," Voina said in a statement.

When the bridge is opened, the erect-looking penis stands beside the local headquarters of the FSB, or Federal Security Service.

The forum will draw international business leaders and will be attended by President Dmitry Medvedev. St. Petersburg is the hometown of both Medvedev and Prime Minister Vladimir Putin, a former KGB officer and FSB chief.

The phallus was still visible Wednesday, when one of the artists was fined by police, a spokesman said.

Voina became a household name in the Russian blogger scene two years ago when it filmed five couples having sex a day before Russia's last presidential election. The stunt was seen as a wry pun on the handover of power.

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