The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Collage Photos Mix War and Present-Day Life

By Marina Darmaros

August 08, 2010

Larenkov spends days in the archive looking for historical photos. His series started with the Siege of Leningrad and now covers many other cities. **Sergei Larenkov**

The idea is simple and effective: Take a photo from World War II and mix the action into a photo from the present day so that you see defensive sand bags being put up on glossy, modern Tverskaya Ulitsa, or tourists standing on the same steps as victorious Russian soldiers at the Reichstag.

The photos are meant to remind people of the sufferings of war, said Sergei Larenkov, whose collage photos have won praise around the world.

A maritime pilot from St. Petersburg, Larenkov now spends much of his time researching historical photographs at the Russian archives.

“Everybody forgets a little,” he said.

Larenkov began making photo collages about five years ago. “I started with old postcards that I collect,” he said. Then he came up with the idea of making collages of the Siege of Leningrad that soon brought him fame after he posted them on his LiveJournal account.

“Then a clerk from the Museum of History of St. Petersburg contacted me with a proposal to do an exhibit about the siege,” he said. The exhibit ran for almost nine months.

Larenkov was surprised at the reaction to the photos.

“I did not expect such a reaction. My main goal was to show this work to school children, and that’s exactly where I made my first exhibition, at a school. Children understand history in a unique way when they can see so clearly the events that took place in a place that is familiar to them,” he said.

The most important stage of work, Larenkov said, is researching historical photographs in the archive. “You have to sit and search, search, search ... It’s something good to do in the winter,” he said, adding that he is a good friend now of the clerks in the Russian State Archive in Krasnogorsk.

Larenkov’s new works portray Vienna, Prague and Berlin. Before working on the series, Larenkov left St. Petersburg for Central Europe with a fixed goal and a well-defined plan. “Before making it, I sat for a long time in the archives looking for these photographs, and then also spent a lot of time searching the Internet, satellites and Google, looking for the concrete locations where they were taken.”

Following the new series, Larenkov plans to work on other cities, such as Paris, London and Istanbul.

He has completed work for United Russia’s web site and has also made a movie for the party, which he enthusiastically promotes.

“It must be shown on the big screen because it has a lot of small details. It is just living history!” he said.

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