

Art Ban Puts Louvre Exhibit in Doubt

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A stab at censorship by the Culture Ministry may derail a high-profile exhibition of Russian modern art in the Louvre, with artists lining up to boycott the event after works were banned from going to France as “too provocative.”

The ban covers the works from the 2004 “Radical Abstractionism” series by Avdei Ter-Oganyan, who reported the incident on his blog late Sunday.

The works in question are simplistic abstract art pieces with notes by the author saying that they incite religious hatred and promote prostitution and various other crimes.

The pictures were to be featured at the exhibit “The Counterpoint: Russian Modern Art,” which is to run in the Louvre from Oct. 14 to Jan. 24. Works by 15 artists and art groups, including Blue Noses and Andrei Monastyrsky, are also to be on display.

The “Radical Abstractionism” series has been freely exhibited in Russia, with the latest show staged this summer at Moscow’s Garage venue, run by Daria Zhukova, girlfriend of billionaire Roman Abramovich.

A number of Louvre participants, including Yury Albert, Andrei Monastyrsky, Igor Makarevich, Vitaly Komar, Vadim Zakharov, Yury Leiderman and Valery Koshlyakov, will boycott the show if Ter-Oganyan's [works](#) are banned, prominent art critic Marat Gelman said Monday.

"Unfortunately, Russian officials don't understand that they are tarnishing the image of the whole country," Gelman told The Moscow Times.

The Culture Ministry did not reply to an inquiry by The Moscow Times on Monday, but a senior official [told RIA-Novosti](#) that the exhibition would not be canceled because the artwork has already been shipped to Paris. Louvre representatives said they were not aware of the scandal.

It remained unclear Monday when the ban on Ter-Oganyan's work was introduced and who ordered it. But Mikhail Mindlin, head of the State Center of Contemporary Art, a co-organizer of the show, confirmed the ban [in an interview](#) to OpenSpace.ru on Monday, saying the works were ruled "unfriendly" and "provocative."

Ter-Oganyan [said on his blog](#) that he initially accepted the offer to exhibit reprints of his works in the Louvre but later backed down because he wanted to protest increasing censorship in Russia.

"Through my refusal, I want to attract attention to the relationship we have between culture and the authorities, or, more precisely, to cause this absurd conflict to escalate," he said. "My artwork was actually created for this purpose, and they serve to vividly demonstrate the idiocy of idiots."

He added that he also has tried to protest the prosecution of fellow artist Oleg Mavromatti, who fled to Bulgaria to escape charges of inciting religious hatred — punishable with up to four years in prison — after a 2000 performance where he was nailed to a cross in an impersonation of Jesus Christ.

Ter-Oganyan himself was the first artist to flee the country because of his art in post-Soviet Russia. He went to the Czech Republic after a performance where he smashed Christian icons with an ax in 1998 prompted authorities to open a case against him.

The scandal is not the first of its kind. The Culture Ministry withdrew modern art pieces by Blue Noses from an exhibit in France in 2007, also ruling them "too provocative." The artwork depicted two male policemen French kissing.

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