The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Gagarin-Inspired Art for 50th Anniversary

By Nick Dowson

April 11, 2011



The Krokin Gallery's "Earth. Cosmos. Gagarin" exhibit starts Thursday.

The Moscow art world has a mass of events to celebrate the 50th anniversary of Yury Gagarin's first flight into space — from exhibits to film and even a Jethro Tull-loving space traveler.

The "Kosmos" project, a British initiative, mixes film, theater and art.

"My interest in Gagarin is purely about art," said curator Margaret Cox. "Cosmonauts were fascinated particularly by the view on Earth — before Gagarin's flight only poets had tried to describe what the Earth looked like from space."

The British Embassy hosted a preview on Friday of its exhibit, which looks at the challenges of life in space and includes videos depicting emotions Gagarin might have felt in space. "Isolation" shows a snow-covered tree being swept by wind. Another film weaves Gagarin's

life story into Russian fairy tales.

Archive footage of Gagarin preparing for the flight, speaking to adoring crowds and meeting dignitaries was also shown on the night.

The exhibition will be shown again Tuesday along with a screening and discussion of Andrei Tarkovsky's film "Solaris."

A reading will also take place Friday of the play "108" — a reference to the minutes Gagarin spent in space — that Cox wrote with Russian playwright Mikhail Durnenkov.

The play is about the characters of six men who were selected as possible candidates to be the first person in space and the training process they went through, Cox said.

This week will also see the showing of "First Orbit," which, filmed from the International Space Station, shows how Gagarin would have seen the earth while on his flight. "I was minus six years old when Gagarin flew but remember growing up in a time of space flight," said producer Chris Riley. "And I couldn't help wondering what Gagarin saw."

The film is slow — just crossing the Pacific takes 90 minutes — but impressive.

Two galleries also have space-related exhibits on this week. The Krokin Gallery asked artists to submit work inspired by Gagarin for its exhibit "Earth. Cosmos. Gagarin," which opens Thursday.

A somewhat more eccentric Gagarin inspiration can be seen at the Vera Pogodina Gallery in Kirill Rubtsov's cartoon-like adventures of a Russian robot made from birch wood.

If you want even more surreal, then head to Perm or outer space as British rock band Jethro Tull and Moscow's Ensemble Opus Posth perform with American astronaut and Jethro Tull fan Catherine Coleman — they in Perm and she on board the International Space Station.

The "Kosmos" exhibition with screening of extracts from "Solaris" and discussion is on Tuesday at 6 p.m. Maly Zal, Dom Kino, 13 Vasilyevskaya Ulitsa. Metro Belorusskaya. Call 8-926-579-9939 to reserve a space on the guest list.

Reading of the play "108" is at 8 p.m. on Friday. Masterskaya, 3 Teatralny Proyezd, Bldg. 3. Metro Lubyanka, Teatralnaya. Tel. 625-6836, mstrsk.ru.

"First Orbit" shows Tuesday at 6 p.m. British Council office, 1 Nikoloyamskaya Ulitsa. Metro Taganskaya, Kitai-Gorod. Tel. 287-1828, britishcouncil.org/russia.htm.

"Kosmicheskaya" runs till May 10. Vera Pogodina Gallery, 5/6 Sredny Kislovsky Pereulok, entrance from the yard. Metro Arbatskaya, Alexandrovsky Sad, Okhotny Ryad. Tel. 695-4823, vp-studio.ru.

"Earth. Cosmos. Gagarin" runs Thursday to May 15. Krokin Gallery, 15 Ulitsa Bolshaya Polyanka. Metro Polyanka. Tel. 959-0141, krokingallery.com.

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https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2011/04/11/gagarin-inspired-art-for-50th-anniversary-a6266