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A View from Above on Russia's Northern Capital

By Olga Khrustaleva

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Taken from the city's roofs, the photos show a view of St. Petersburg that few residents and tourists would have the opportunity to otherwise see. **Sergei Luks**

ST. PETERSBURG — The rooftops of St. Petersburg are an iconic element of 21st-century sightseeing in the city. In addition to climbing up the towers of the Smolny or St. Isaac's cathedrals, informal rooftop tours have become popular, while for adventurous diners, romantic dinners for two on a rooftop overlooking the city center can be arranged.

Hiking up a real rooftop, however, generally involves both courage and determination. This winter, even those who suffer from vertigo will have the opportunity to enjoy spectacular panoramic views of the city as the exhibit "High-Altitude St. Petersburg" opens at the Russian Geographical Society.

"Our aim is to show beautiful photographs," Andrei Strelnikov, the exhibit's curator said. "Something that people walking, riding the metro or a bus wouldn't normally see. Sun, air,

sunrises and sunsets and, of course, the unusual spots from which the photos were taken."

Seventeen local photographers — both professionals and amateurs — took part in the exhibit, which comprises 44 works. Looking at some of the breathtaking works, it is at times difficult to recognize the city. The play of light, beautiful architecture, even old and quite rundown buildings look authentic and inspiring, evoking a feeling of romance and not unpleasant melancholia.

A background for the photographs has been provided by the young artist Yelena Kovalyova, whose graphic ink-painted works frame the images.

"We hope it will become another push to immerse the audience in the atmosphere of height, rooftops and contemplation," Strelnikov said.

There are many aspects of St. Petersburg that inspire poets, songwriters and artists, and roofs are certainly among them. They have been depicted in many films about the city, and despite the fact that walking on them has been forbidden by the police, it remains one of the most popular means of entertainment.

Finding an apartment with roof access is considered truly lucky, and those who venture up onto a rooftop in the middle of summer may be surprised by how many other people have had the same idea of going up there to sunbathe, paint, or simply hang around doing little other than admire the view.

In order to select the photographs to be shown, Strelnikov read blogs and visited various Internet communities dedicated to the city's rooftops. While small and short-term rooftop exhibits have previously been held in the city, this is the first relatively large-scale project of its kind, and is likely to thrill sky-gazers.

"High-Altitude St. Petersburg" runs through Feb. 21 at the Russian Geographical Society, 10 Pereulok Grivtsova. St. Petersburg. Tel. 8 800 700 1845. Metro Sennaya Ploshchad, Sadovaya. Entrance is free. Website: Spb.rgo.ru

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