

Roly-Poly Reifies 'National Idea'

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Saburov, right, displaying the toy.

While Russia may not seem like a country to play around with, the object that most encompasses its "national idea" is a roly-poly toy, according to a contest to determine what artwork would represent the country at this year's Venice Biennale.

The roly-poly, which rises back up when pushed over, "is inherently a very accurate representation of the Russian mentality and history of the country," said contest co-organizer Georgy Mamin, of the CF Art Group.

"Russia is filled with contradictions that refuse to settle," he said. "It sways in search of new meanings, but an unknown force keeps it in balance and allows it to survive in seemingly hopeless situations."

Winner Vitaly Saburov, who thought of the idea when putting away his son's toys, was awestruck when awarded with the 300,000 ruble (\$10,000) grand prize for his artwork, inscribed with "Russia: Never overturn."

A 5-meter-high version of his object, featuring a wooden log crowned with a double-headed eagle, will be showcased at the biennial contemporary art fair in Venice.

Saburov, a marketing consultant without a strong artistic background, beat at least 500 other competitors for the honor to represent Russia at the fair, a major event in the European arts community.

Mamin and fellow co-organizer Denis Saunin chose the roly-poly after two rounds of voting and a shortlist of six concepts was formed.

Not all the works were original, Mamin said. "Among the recurrent themes, metaphors with children and family were the most popular, second was religion and after that literature, astronauts and other cultural aspects."

All the concepts submitted to the national idea contest will be showcased later this month at конкурskonцепций.рф.

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