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Moscow's Insomniacs Cluster For Museum Night

By Simone Peek

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A meeting in front of Dmitriy Shorin's exhibit at the Gallery of Fine Art. The painting reads: "We are not alone." **Vladimir Filonov**

This Saturday, Moscow will celebrate a "Day of Historical and Cultural Heritage." The name of the large-scale event correctly reflects the numerous activities during the day, starting from 10 a.m. But if one listens to the whispering on the streets, it will seem that all centers of historical and cultural heritage are saving their strength for the evening hours.

May 18 will be the seventh edition of Museum Night. More than 200 venues will keep their doors open past 6 p.m., and some throughout the entire night, the majority of which have free entry.

All the leading museums are contributing: Every branch of the Tretyakov museum, the Pushkin Museum, the Moscow Museum of Modern Art and even those that you might have only glanced the name of on one occasion, will likely be opening their doors for Museum

Night.

This year's logo, a bright, glowing electrical hare, was designed by French artist Philippe Parreno. According to the organizers, the hare symbolizes the evening's ethos: Move lightning-fast to chase and catch the miracles of the night.

The evening promises high attendance, and in the case of some museums to the point of inconvenience.

"Where last year in the space of six hours, 800,000 people visited the city's museums, this year we expect to attract more then a million," Sergey Kapitov, head of Moscow's department of culture told Rossiiskaya Gazeta.

This may prove an obstruction to the full enjoyment of this remarkably large-scale initiative, and in some cases, will make it rather impossible to gain entry to more than one museum at all.

One of last year's main complaints was that the lines in front of museums were extremely long. Unfortunately, this year the arrangements to guide and divide visitors over different locations have been left to the museums themselves.

"What can we do about it?" said one agitated employee from the Museum Night hotline, who wished to remain anonymous.

On Museums Night's official website, visitors can make a profile and "attend" certain events. But this is by no means a binding action and says nothing about the number who will eventually make it through the doors.

Some of the museums have even started to arrange entertainment for the waiting visitors.

The Museum of Soviet Arcade Machines is filled with reliquary but still working game machines and was a popular destination during last year's Museum Night.

"Our museum has room for about 300 visitors at a time. In total, we had about 1000 to 2000 guests. Some visitors waited in line for three hours," Alexander Stakhanov, director of the Museum of Soviet Arcade Machines said.

This year Stakhanov plans to place some of the game machines outside, and to make waiting more enjoyable, there will also be a Soviet vintage cocktail-machine from which the visitors can purchase drinks.

Another location that is likely to attract many visitors is the Mayakovsky Museum, which is due for a big reconstruction this summer and is not expected to open agin until the end of 2014.

On Museum Night, many avant-garde lovers will try to catch the museum in it's full glory. Free excursions (latest starts at 9 p.m.), a documentary screening and a Mayakovsky themed open-mic are just a small selection of the museum's program.

In the courtyard, there will be live music until 11 p.m. to comfort the waiting.

To cater to the crowds, a shuttle bus service has been organized. Three different bus routes will provide a connection between metro stations and other museums. The buses are free of charge.

Although the project is called Museum Night, most of the happenings end when the clock strikes midnight.

Only a few locations offer entertainment after midnight. The official afterparty is held at Manezh, where multiple electronic music acts will keep the night alive until 5 a.m.

Examples of other after hours activities are Solyanka (music and excursions until 5 a.m.), K35 (excursions until 3 a.m.), Agency Art (excursions until 4 a.m.) and Veresov Gallery, who are brave enough to keep their 18th to 19th century imperial porcelain on display all the way until 6 a.m.

The plague of any festival-type of event is the feeling that you are in a rush. Having to choose between 200 free museums requires grave decision-making, and it will always feel as though you missed something important.

But it would be a shame to let the magnificent options of this night pass by just because of their abundance.

Thus, there is only one sane resolution to make: "Feel the moment. Don't try to visit more than two museums. If it is too busy, just go out for a walk and try to enjoy the summer night," Stahkanov said.

For more information on museums, locations, fees and more, visit www.museumnight.org.

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