

# Prizewinning 'Bribe' Monument Seeks a Site

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A nationwide competition began in June of last year for the design of the best monument commemorating bribes. However, with the competition now finished, the future of the winning monument remains uncertain.

The competition, based in St. Petersburg, sparked significant interest among artists, professionals and amateurs alike with more than 400 designs submitted from beyond Moscow and St. Petersburg.

But it was Moscow-based artist, Pyotr Navdayev, who won first prize. The artist received 150,000 rubles (\$4,785) for his efforts from the event sponsor, Boris Lipner.

The president of the competition's jury, Anatoly Belkin, is very skeptical about the chances of Navdayev's monument actually being installed, with the main reason being that St. Petersburg residents would really like to see the sculpture placed in close proximity to an

important government or state institution, from the city hall to the prosecutor's office or any local court.

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Anatoly Belkin

Jury President

"As for me, when people ask me what would be an ideal location for such a monument, I always reply that a spot outside any building that houses a state authority, from the Kremlin to a village council, would be most appropriate," Belkin said. "But I doubt that the officials will find a place for this kind of razor-edged wit."

The next step for the competition organizers is to get in touch with St. Petersburg City Hall's town planning and architecture committee for permission to install the monument.

The project's designers seem to have few ambitions about the possible future locations of their creations. They have suggested quiet city parks, alleys or serene pedestrian streets, far away from any government institutions.

Lipner is convinced that the monument will indeed be installed. He chose the contest's title as an allusion to the famous phrase from Nikolai Gogol's legendary play, "The Inspector General," in which the writer uses the expression "to take bribes in the form of greyhound puppies."

The phrase has since become a symbol of bribe taking and has been widely used in Russia ever since.

"Because the title is talking about greyhounds, I do not think that any sane official would refuse to allocate some space for it in a local park," Lipner said.

Alexander Borovsky, a member of the competition's jury and a respected art historian with the State Russian Museum, said he liked the tongue-in-cheek approach that some of the artists took towards the subject.

"This is no easy topic," he said. "The task was to commemorate an issue that is a shameful one, something that is despised by society. It was crucial to show taste here, and create an artful sculpture without turning it into a farcical one."

The contest finalists' projects went on public display on May 14 at the St. Petersburg Museum for Urban Sculpture on Nevsky Prospekt.

Local residents who attended the display of the projects have been most enthusiastic with proposing potential locations for them. Many people suggested areas near their district authority headquarters.

The locals have also left notes supporting the most successful projects of their own choice. All sculptures were exhibited anonymously, meaning that the artists' names were withheld.

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