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Guelman Says Fired for Controversial Sochi Exhibit

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Marat Guelman, a prominent art gallery owner and the director of the Perm Museum of Contemporary Art, says he has been fired for showcasing an exhibition on the 2014 Sochi Olympics that authorities called unpatriotic.

Local and federal authorities were outraged by the "Welcome! Sochi 2014" exhibition organized as part of the Perm White Nights festival earlier this month, which featured posters of satirical caricatures. One depicted a vampiric Josef Stalin in a polar bear costume, while another showed Olympic rings made of barbed wire.

Guelman, who has headed the museum since 2008, said in an interview with Afisha magazine on Wednesday that the decision was announced by the acting culture minister of the Perm region, Igor Gladnev, with whom Guelman closely cooperated during the state-funded White Nights festival.

Even though Gladnev did not cite a reason for the resignation, Guelman said, it was clear that the scandal with the "Welcome! Sochi 2014" exhibition prompted the decision.

"The Perm region culture minister closed three exhibitions at the Perm White Nights festival, calling them unpatriotic. I said the censorship was unacceptable and placed them in my museum," Guelman told Afisha.

The "Welcome! Sochi 2014" exhibition was closed by authorities several days after its opening on June 1, a move seemingly provoked by a visit to the city by top sports officials on June 5.

Several State Duma deputies and Federation Council members denounced the exhibit and its organizers. Andrei Klimov, a Federation Council member from the Perm region, said the exhibition was reminiscent of "how Hitler's propagandists pictured Russia."

"I would like to know what those who gave money for these Russophobic displays think about the matter," he wrote in a column in the local paper Zvezda.

A week after the scandal broke, pro-Kremlin Izvestia reported that the Audit Chamber would conduct an inquiry into the allocation of budget funds for the White Nights festival.

Guelman said at that time that the check had been provoked by Izvestia, which earlier reported that the festival cost the region's budget 250 million rubles.

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