

# Fabre Fallout Over Taxidermy Art Show at the Hermitage

By [Andrei Muchnik](#)

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## Zuma

Yet another discussion about a controversial exhibition has consumed the Russian media and social networks this week. “Jan Fabre: Knight of Despair / Warrior of Beauty,” currently on show at the State Hermitage in St. Petersburg, features a number of stuffed dead animals, including dogs hanging from the ceiling.

Part of the exhibition, which includes 230 works from sculpture and drawings to video art and installations, is situated in the main Hermitage building. Here Fabre’s works juxtapose with the creations of Dutch and Flemish master painters, to the ire of art lovers and animal rights activists alike.

The campaign against Fabre follows the same pattern as an incident at the Lumiere Brothers Center for Photography earlier this year, where joint efforts by bloggers and politicians led to

closure of an exhibition by photographer Jock Sturges.

The Hermitage began to receive complaints via social media from visitors, under the hashtag “pozorermityazhu” (shame on the Hermitage). The cause was soon taken up by high-profile figures including conservative politician Vitaly Milonov.

Keen to highlight that Fabre is actually an animal lover, the museum has stated that all of the corpses used in the exhibit were from stray animals who died due to road traffic accidents.

“Today the exhibition was examined and discussed by professional zoologists, veterinarians, animal rights specialists and child psychologists. They unanimously determined that it was an important exhibition and that the accusations about it were unfounded,” said Dmitry Ozerkov, contemporary art division curator at the Hermitage, in a statement to The Moscow Times.

The Russian Ministry of Culture was quick to follow with a statement on their website: “The Hermitage, as well as other Russian museums, is independent and enjoys the freedom of setting its own priorities regarding its exhibitions, themes, and design. Agreement with the Ministry of Culture is therefore not deemed compulsory.”

Jan Fabre, a Belgian multidisciplinary artist who is fond of using animals in his work, is no stranger to controversy. He received 20,000 complaints after a 2012 performance piece in which he threw howling cats up a stairwell in Antwerp City Hall and he once decorated the Royal Palace of Brussels with 1.6 million scarab wings.

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