The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Zhdun, the Latest Meme Sweeping Over Russia — Exclusive Interview

This gray, vaguely anthropomorphic blob of epoxy made in the Netherlands is the latest craze on the Russian internet.

By Eva Hartog

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Margriet Van-Breevoort / margrietvanbreevoort.nl

If you haven't wasted countless hours waiting in line — at the post office, at the ticket booth of a train station, at the hospital, wherever! — you've never lived in Russia.

But since a couple of weeks, clock-staring Russians have a virtual companion: the creature Zhdun. Zhdun has become the RuNet's latest hero, popping up all over Russia wherever waiting is the norm. On the coast waiting for the Kerch bridge to connect Crimea to the mainland, at Alexei Navalny's court hearing waiting for the judge to issue a verdict, even in the Kremlin.

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Лучшая фотография с сегодняшнего заседания в процессе "Кировлес-2". Атмосферная.

Фото опубликовано navalny4 (@navalny4) Фев 1 2017 в 5:25 PST

But as popular as Zhdun has become — this week he was declared a "national symbol" — little is known about him, except that he was created by a Dutch designer.

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The Moscow Times sat down with Zhdun to get a peak into his soul.

Zhdun is not your real name.

No, my real name is Homunculus Loxodontus. I'm a new species. It's the combination of the Latin term for “little man” or “artificial human” and the word for African elephant, because of my trunk. But I like Zhdun, it's like a nickname.

How old are you?

I'm one year old.

You're Dutch, right? What do you think of Russia? Is there a culture clash?

I've found it really easy to fit in. I'm the first specimen of my species, so I don't really belong anywhere. Because people relate to my mentality I feel at home here.

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> Новый логотип почты России) Почтовый Ждун) pic.twitter.com/T2GfdMOHhz
>
> — Ангелина Зотова (@zotova_angel33) 8 февраля 2017 г.

Don't you ever get bored?

You have to fully embrace the waiting. And there are enough people keeping me company.

Do you ever talk?

No, I'm more of a silent companion. The shy, introverted type.

A Russian political scientist this week described you as “sad, lazy and sluggish.” Is that a fair description?

I am lazy and sluggish. But I'm not sad. I'm just very shy and insecure.

Will you ever stop waiting?

I don't really have a choice. This is who I am.

But do you ever dream of just getting up and leaving the place?

Everyone who waits hopes it'll stop at some point. I'm slightly stuck in what I am, but aren’t most people?

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Фото опубликовано Ждун (@zjhdun) Янв 31 2017 в 1:37 PST

The Moscow Times also sat down with Zhdun's creator, the Dutch designer Margriet van Breevoort, to discuss Zhdun's unexpected popularity in Russia.

“Everyone sees what they want in Zhdun”

“The assignment was to create a sculpture inspired by the LUMC [Leids Universitair Medisch Centrum]. The first thing that struck me were the waiting rooms. I wanted to make something that would embody the atmosphere, the elderly people sitting there, with folded hands who with a suffering look on their faces stared ahead of themselves. As a patient that's what you experience in a hospital: you're mostly waiting until it's your turn.

But I also wanted to make something that could offer patients hope and solace, a companion of sorts.

At the same time it was also a kind of joke towards the genetic research that's being done at that hospital, like the result of a failed experiment that still thinks things could get better."

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Where did you get your inspiration from?

I'd been making sketches, and was googling images just for inspiration and then at some point I saw the head of an elephant seal, and it looked so funny, slightly stupid but sweet and it completely matched the idea I had for the sculpture.

I'd had thoughts before about making a mountain of flesh and that combined perfectly with the elephant seal head and the two small hands that symbolize waiting.

The entire process took me about five months. Zhdun is made out of epoxy, a hard plastic.

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> спойлер #Sherlock @ждун pic.twitter.com/62l25JY77L
>
> — vs (@sarabarabu) 1 февраля 2017 г.

When did you realize that Zhdun had gone viral in Russia?

I started getting lots of new Russian followers on Instagram and I thought: what's happening here? So I googled myself and realized. It's started to lead a life of its own, it's completely spiraled out of control. All I do is sit behind my computer answering mails and messages. Everyone wants something from me.

Do you enjoy it?

It's very overwhelming, it's hard to keep everyone happy. At the same time it's fun. It's like a dream come true. Everyone wants to become famous, or to get recognition for their work.

Embed:

> Откуда взялся Ждун? https://t.co/oh6f19uvb2 pic.twitter.com/wnw2VVprJS
>
> — MediaZavod.ru (@MediaZavod_ru) 1 февраля 2017 г.

Do you understand why Zhdun has become this popular in Russia?

Russians are trying to explain to me that they recognize themselves in this “waiting” and that it really embodies the Russian mentality.

What are your plans in Russia? Is Russia is going to get its own Zhdun?

I am getting requests for one. But it was commissioned as a unique piece for the LUMC, they're the owners of this piece. I can't just make a copy of it.

Original url: https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2017/02/12/zhdun-interview-a57121