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Need a World Cup Mural? Russian Paints Giant Portrait of His Wife on Moscow Wall

By Reuters

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Tatyana Makeyeva / Reuters

The head of a Russian advertising agency tasked with decorating Moscow facades ahead of the football World Cup used the opportunity to commission a 12-story high mural of his wife.

The portrait shows Novatek Art director Ivan Panteleev's wife Daria in a gym kit holding a football against the backdrop of a bright blue sky. Cartoon birds fly around her.

"This is the mural with which we are welcoming all foreigners to Russia and inviting them to the football games!" Novatek Art wrote in a description of the picture on social media.

The funding for the facade in Zhulebino district came from the Moscow city budget, Panteleev told Reuters. It is one of four World Cup murals co-sponsored by the city's public relations committee.

"It's true that the model for this painting was my wife," Panteleev said, adding that with such large paintings artists need to rely on a photograph and in this case the model was his wife.

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He said one of the two painters is Thai graffiti artist Mue Bon, whose visit to Russia was sponsored by a government department for another Novatek Art project related to the World Cup.

The portrait, unveiled before the World Cup began on June 14, has drawn the ire of many in Russia's street art community.

"Usually (Ivan) says his critics are just jealous. In this case – we're definitely jealous. Don't we all wish we had husbands like that, right ladies?" gallery director Anna Nistratova wrote in a sarcastic post on her Facebook page.

Daria Panteleeva defended her portrait.

"If an artist or an organizer is commissioned to paint a 'blonde Russian woman with a ball'... why should anyone care if the artist paints a woman they know or a stranger?" Panteleeva replied to the public social media post.

A filmed trailer for the World Cup series of facades, showing how Panteleeva was spray-painted onto the building, was a news item on Russia's state-controlled Channel 1 television network.

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