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Moscow Museums and the World Cup

Even the city's greatest art institutions are going to miss the football

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Sergei Kiselyov / Moskva News Agency

There's a sense of dread about the conclusion of the World Cup among those of us living in Moscow. For four amazing weeks, our city has been filled with people from all around the world. Everything about the city seemed to radiate during this time. And now that football fans are returning home and things are going back to normal, the letdown is going to be mighty.

Be that as it may, Moscow's museums stepped up to the occasion of Russia's hosting the World Cup in their individual ways, and most of their football-focused exhibitions will last into August (though not all). So for those of us remaining in the city now, they are a great way to remember the fun we've had this summer — or just as likely, they will be useful vehicles for us to wallow in the miserable self-pity of the anti-climax.

But whatever your state of mind, here are some of the football exhibitions that are worth checking out.

The "Not Only Football" exhibition at the New Tretyakov Gallery is a good place to begin. In Russia, sports became a focus for the arts in the late 1920s and early 1930s — when sports as recreation became more popular. The New Tretyakov Gallery has dipped into its massive collections to find some of the most interesting paintings, drawings and sculptures regarding sports from the 1920s onward. Also, any trip to the New Tretyakov is a welcome opportunity to visit the museum's permanent collection, the largest of Russian and Soviet art from the 20th century in Russia. Here you can see some of the best avant-garde, socialist realist and underground art.

The "Anxiety on the Couch" exhibition at the Garage Museum of Contemporary Art is something of the moment and a bit out of the ordinary. In honor of the World Cup, German photographer and football fanatic Juergen Teller shot a special series of photographs and videos about football, new and old football players and fans, football games and football accouterments. Some photographs are funny, and others are even unsettling.

The curators of the Shchusev Museum of Architecture in Moscow have used the World Cup as a reason to hold an exhibit of the rich art and history of Soviet and Russian stadiums. The first half of the show is dedicated to sketches, drawings and photographs of some of the country's great Soviet stadiums that varied in style from slightly avant-garde to solidly classical. The show highlights some unusual stadiums, like a U-shaped one, and brings to life the excitement of the first major sporting events held in the country. The second half is about some of the world's best stadiums and the Russian stadiums built or reconstructed for this year's matches, illustrated with models, photographs and designs.

For something entirely unrelated, while you're at the museum check out one of the permanent exhibitions at the Shchusev: "David Sarkisian's Office." David Sarkisian was director of the Shchusev Museum from 2000 until his death in 2009, a beloved and colorful fighter for the preservation of Moscow's architectural heritage. His office was also a legend — an unfathomable, cluttered mess. After his death, colleagues at the museum, relatives and friends preserved his office by recreating it in the Ruined Wing, an exhibition space he created himself. In 2010, a virtual installation of the office was presented at the Venice Architecture Biennale. It's the ultimate non-sports exhibition.

The Karelia Pavilion at VDNKh is hosting a large exhibition about football in Russia and the Soviet Union. It is divided into three sections: the history of pre-revolutionary and Soviet football, a hall of fame honoring the best players of all time and the modern history of Russian football. This exhibition tells the story through cinematography, fine arts, animation, literature, photography, graphics and computer games. You can see Soviet and Russian football in rare news photos; admire football badges, banners and other fan and player attributes lent by collectors and sports clubs; listen to "the sound of the stadium" recorded in various stadiums over the years; and see photographs and examples of less well-known Russian footballers, like special village and women's teams. In one area you can even play football on old Soviet slot machines and early computer games — and learn about virtual football promoted by the Russian Federation of Cyber Football. Basically, if you are curious about Russian football, this is the exhibition to see.

Check out these fine exhibitions while they last. And by doing so, extend the fun we've had celebrating the World Cup a little longer.

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