

GAGOSIAN GALLERY

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

- EUROPE NEWS
- SEPTEMBER 12, 2008

Auctions

Red September

A Major Gallery Show in Russia Puts the Spotlight on the Moscow Art Market

By [KELLY CROW](#)

Russian billionaires are dominating the bidding at auctions in London and New York, but so far they haven't done much shopping for trophy art in Moscow, largely because the city's dozen-odd galleries rarely show works priced over \$100,000 apiece. Next week may mark Moscow's turning point: On Wednesday, a leading New York art dealer, Larry Gagosian, will test the depths of the local market by opening a gallery show near the Kremlin featuring around 70 artworks whose sales could exceed \$300 million. The month-long show will offer art by gallery standbys like Cy Twombly and Takashi Murakami as well as minimalist pieces borrowed from stars like Robert Ryman and up-and-comers like Wade Guyton and Banks Violette. The works will be displayed in a former chocolate factory located on an island in the Moscow River, near the city center.



It's quite a departure from the gallery's initial foray into the Moscow art scene last October, when Mr. Gagosian took a trunk show of 40 artworks, including pieces by Pablo Picasso, to a luxury mall on the city's outskirts. Victoria Gelfand, a Belarus native who directs the Gagosian Gallery in London, says the first show fared well but taught the gallery a few ground rules. Local collectors prefer pieces by hip living artists over long-gone masters, and Ms. Gelfand says they expect an event-style gallery opening with a "reassuring" crowd of European and U.S. collectors.

The latest endeavor has been expensive for the gallery, complicated by the perceived security risks in doing business in Moscow. Axa Art and Hiscox, the gallery's insurers, insisted that the gallery transform the empty chocolate factory into a veritable fortress, complete with a climate-control system, metal detectors, hidden cameras, panic button at the reception desk, and at least 14 armed guards, including one to patrol the factory grounds around the clock. The rate to insure these artworks was also 25% higher than usual, according to LeConte Moore, an art-insurance broker with the DeWitt Stern Group who handled the deal. "At least the gallery isn't scrimping," Mr. Moore says. (The gallery says this sale is a one-off; it has no plans yet to open a permanent branch in Moscow.)

GAGOSIAN GALLERY

The tense political situation in Russia, which recently invaded neighboring Georgia, could threaten the party mood. So far, though, the gallery insists people haven't canceled their trips because of the attack. The stiffest competition for collectors' attention has been London's coming fashion week. The gallery says at least 300 people from Europe and the U.S. are planning to attend its private dinner following the opening. Sam Orlofsky, the show's curator, was still extending invitations last week. When he ran into collector Michael Ovitz at a gallery opening in New York, he says he "begged" Mr. Ovitz to come to Moscow. Mr. Ovitz says he considered the offer but is staying put: "It's a long way to go for the weekend."



Gagosian Gallery

Larry Gagosian is opening a temporary art exhibit in this former chocolate factory in Moscow.

The sale's blue-chip roster is intended to appeal to potentially nervous Russian buyers, but Mr. Orlofsky says he was careful to include new works suited to Western tastes. There's a new car hood sculpture by Richard Prince, for example, and a new suite of swirling abstracts by Mr. Twombly. Mr. Murakami, known for his cartoon-like imagery, painted a vine-like abstract for the show and promised to attend the opening, as have Mr. Prince and artist Anselm Reyle. To lend the show further heft, the gallery borrowed a not-for-sale steel sculpture by Jeff Koons that is shaped to look like a tinfoil-wrapped chocolate egg. (The gallery won't divulge its art prices, but Mr. Twombly's abstracts have sold at auction for around \$5 million apiece and Mr. Murakami's paintings regularly cost around \$1 million.)

The gallery is also hedging its bets by scheduling its opening at the same time as the buzzed-about launch of a nonprofit exhibition space in Moscow called the Center for Contemporary Culture Moscow, nicknamed the Garage because it is located in a converted bus depot. The center is the brainchild of billionaire Roman Abramovich's Russian girlfriend, Daria Zhukova. Ms. Gelfand says Ms. Zhukova agreed to share her invitation list with the gallery and make room for its out-of-town guests at her gala dinner on Tuesday. The Garage will be exhibiting conceptual installations by Ilya and Emilia Kabakov, who fled censorship in the Soviet Union and now live in Long Island, N.Y.

Galleries in Moscow are watching to see how the Gagosian show sells. Sabina Orudjeva, director of the local RuArts Gallery, says her clients seek out provocative pieces by young, local artists rather than Mr. Gagosian's "status art." On the other hand, she says, "The market here is young and changeable, so it may react differently this fall and grab hold of it all."

Write to Kelly Crow at kelly.crow@wsj.com