



### *The Ark of Pushkinskaya: 10 Floats To The Future* Mariëlle van den Bergh, Netherlands

As artists-in-residence of the St. Petersburg Art Residency (SPAR) in Russia, my artist-husband Mels Dees and I were based in the building of the Art Center Pushkinskaya 10 in St. Petersburg. The location—next to Nevsky Prospekt, the city's main street—couldn't be more central. The building has been a stronghold of Soviet and Russian subculture, originating with the resistance of artists and the samizdat, or the copying of banned texts, during the 1970s and 1980s. The building hosts studios and apartments for artists, along with the Museum of Sound, the Rock Museum, and the Museum of Non-Conformist Art. It also houses a shrine to the Beatles (during the Cold War, John Lennon gave money to the artists) and a small art gallery. One of the founders of Art Center Pushkinskaya-10 is the internationally-known artist Sergej Kowalskij.

We were residents in St. Petersburg during an anniversary of the Art Center and I was asked to participate. Together with SPAR director Anastasia Patsey, I decided to make a paper sculpture for one of the building's entrances. The piece was the *Ark of Pushkinskaya 10*, a mythical object that was pictured in a book about the art center.

In this image, the ark is carried by the founders of Pushkinskaya-10. It was accompanied by a poem written by Kowalskij, who explained his vision of a new world where the past, present, and future are concentrated in Pushkinskaya 10, and from where parallel worlds originate and exist. So the ark is a symbol of hope for the future and a symbol of the power of art against corruption in society. I started to work from the book's image of the ark.

Collecting the right materials wasn't easy in St. Petersburg. The main material was rolls of Wenzhou rice paper. The local art supplier had the paper, PVA glue to use as the bookbinder, and the glue gun sticks. At home, I used pulp cane, the traditional material for weaving baskets, to construct the structure. I took reed from an Asian rolling shutter that I purchased at a huge building material shop. I also found bamboo and LED lights to incorporate.

The frame was built with bamboo and reed, and covered with glue-soaked snippets of paper. After drying, the paper became translucent, allowing light inside the object to shine through.

At the anniversary celebration, Sergej recited his poem

and the ark was carried into the open space by the founders of the art center, bringing the image to reality. The celebrations continued for the rest of the day, with rock concerts, a performance by a Berlin-based Russian art troupe, and literature lectures. Meanwhile, I continued to work on the ark, building the hull of the boat. I stood in the square, where members of the public could assist me. The public of St. Petersburg has a very open mind to art as we noticed from the Museum Night some weeks before. We had done a workshop with recycled materials and were impressed by the eagerness and the artistic talents of the participants.

Over the next week, I worked on the boat, which would carry the ark. But it was missing something. Then, on a trip to the home of 19th-century painter Ilya Repin, who is considered to be the Rembrandt of Russia, we walked the beach and dug up a fishing rope, complete with seaweed. I had found my special artifact.

The *Ark of Pushkinskaya 10* is located in the main entrance of the building. It is permanently lit, illuminating the night. It is one of the many art objects in the building. You can visit Art Center Pushkinskaya 10 during opening hours.

For more information: [www.artresidency.ru](http://www.artresidency.ru), <http://www.saint-petersburg.com/museums/museum-non-conformist-art>, <http://www.p-10.ru> and [www.mmblog.eu](http://www.mmblog.eu).



BELOW SPAR studio picture, working on the Ark. Photo courtesy of the artist. RIGHT Workshop during the Anniversary, constructing the hull of the Ark. The public is invited to participate with artist Mariëlle van den Bergh. Photo by Mels Dees. OPPOSITE The Ark, night picture. Photo courtesy of artist.

