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An exhibit presents a personal vision of St. Petersburg. Timeless Views

BY EDMUND HARRIS

St. Petersburg may have gotten a fresh coat of paint for its 300th anniversary last year, but photographer Alexei Titarenko prefers to focus his lens on the seedier side of the city, believing that its charm lies in an air of peeling decay.

"There are quite a lot of well-restored cities in the world ... and if St. Petersburg were to become like them, its individuality would be lost," Titarenko

wrote in a recent e-mail from New York. His images, which are now on display at the Le Carré Blanc restaurant, depict a dilapidated metropolis, in which crowds appear as a faceless, ghostly presence thanks to the use of time-lapse photography.

The Leningrad-born photographer first showed his black-and-white pictures of monumental buildings and bleak street corners at a 1989 show in France, and has since held personal exhibitions in Italy, Luxembourg and the United States, largely focusing on St. Petersburg, although he has also

portrayed Venice and Paris.

Most of the photographs at the current retrospective were taken in the perestroika and Yeltsin eras, but echo clas-

sic images from earlier years. "I try to photograph other cities in a different style, leaving St. Petersburg always looking the same," stated Titarenko.



ALEXEI TITARENKO

His aim is to convey a "generalised image" of St. Petersburg's tragic fate in the 20th century, Titarenko commented, and the photographer finds inspiration from the city's surroundings, which he believes "weigh down and impress their mentality on people."

Sharing an entrance hall with neighbors from communal flats, many of whom are alcoholics, makes it clear how little the city has really changed in recent years, the photographer commented. "It reminds me not simply of the perestroika era, but actually of 'Crime and Punishment.'"

According to Titarenko, comparisons between his images and the works of Dostoevsky "are clear to see," and he stated that the novelist's works were "very close" to his style. "Just like me, Dostoevsky avoids the salubrious side of life, but often expresses himself in a romantic way," the photographer commented.

Titarenko rarely shows his work in Moscow, and stated that he was not inspired by the city, calling it "similar in spirit to many other world capitals."

**TITARENKO
USES LONG
EXPOSURES
TO CREATE
HIS MOODY
IMAGES OF
URBAN
STREETS.**