

Foreigners in the U.S.S.R.: From Loren to Castro

By [Irina Zabrodina](#)

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Elton John and his mother visiting Peterhof, Peter the Great's grand palace, just outside Leningrad, in the 1970s.

Though foreigners are not quite a dime a dozen on the streets of Moscow today, an exhibit at the Winzavod Center for Contemporary Art takes the viewer back to the time when a guest from abroad was front-page news.

Take a look at Fidel Castro in women's shoes in a Soviet stadium, Sophia Loren standing on Kutuzovsky Prospekt or Elton John in Peterhof Palace — where they look as if they fit in and don't all at the same time.

The exhibit is the third in a series at Winzavod that looks at 20th-century photos. With only 50 or so photos, the exhibit is not the biggest but casts a valuable light on many fascinating moments at a time when few foreigners of note made it to the Soviet Union.

The photos are from the archive of the Itar-Tass news agency.

“Culture was the one and only entrance into the U.S.S.R.,” said Vitaly Ignatenko, general director of Itar-Tass. “Only the most famous educational, scientific and cultural figures had the opportunity to pass through the Iron Curtain.”

The exhibit starts with prewar images of a visit by legendary Swiss architect Le Corbusier, following with wartime images of Stalin and Churchill meeting in Moscow. Then it zips through the Khrushchev era with Federico Fellini’s visits to the capital and finishes with the late 1980s.

One of the images shows Castro at Kirov Stadium in Leningrad taking photos while wearing a warm jacket and women’s shoes.

“It was quite an surprise for me,” said Itar-Tass photo editor Felix Shmaiger. “I’ve seen this picture many times, but only when it had been printed out in a large scale did I see this detail.”

“Foreigners in the U.S.S.R.” runs till Oct. 14 at the Winzavod Center for Contemporary Art. 1 4th Syromyatnichesky Pereulok, Bldg. 6. Metro Chkalovskaya, Kurskaya. Tel. 917-4646, www.winzavod.ru.

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