

## Designer of Live Children Statues Responds to Criticism

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Nine and 10-year-old girls posing as silver wind goddesses during a reception in St. Petersburg.

The creator of an art exhibit featuring young girls made to pose as statues at a reception in St. Petersburg has responded to criticism that the children were mistreated, saying the girls were never in any kind of danger.

"The children were in comfortable silver displays and wanted to go back," art exhibit designer Viktor Kramer told the Dozhd Internet channel Sunday.

Kramer said he was ready to bear any responsibility for the event, since there was never any harm in the first place.

St. Petersburg's children's rights ombudsman Svetlana Agapitova backed Kramer up, saying there was no violation, RIA-Novosti reported.

"There were no kinds of violations at all, this is a common performance by a children's group at an event. This story has been blown out of proportion from nothing," Agapitova, said.

She added that the parents knew about their children's participation, which resulted from an agreement between a dance studio and event organizers, and that the children themselves enjoyed it.

Kramer suggested the governor who posted a photo of the children to Twitter, Kirov Governor Nikita Belykh, was manipulating the situation for political benefit.

"I'm not interested in politics, but in my opinion, Mr. Belykh is making cheap PR," Kramer said. Kramer added that "there was just a small news conference with parents, children and leadership of the team, where they were all indignant regarding the nonsense this gentleman created."

Belykh published a photo of the girls on Twitter after the event Thursday, writing "In St. Petersburg, this is how they torture children. ... Where is @Rfdeti?" referring to the Twitter account of Russia's children's rights ombudsman, Pavel Astakhov.

At a reception for guests of the St. Petersburg International Economic Forum last week, four girls about nine and 10 years old posed as goddesses blowing wind across a silvery reflective lake. The girls also wore silver outfits and makeup, which Kramer pointed out was safe for children.

Several guests expressed surprise and outrage that children had been used for the display, writing messages in on social media sites.

A software company executive eventually pulled the girls out of the exhibit, outraged that the girls where made to stand with the sun reflecting brightly into their eyes.

The event was hosted by the governor of St. Petersburg, though the governor's office denied responsibility for the treatment of the children.

"The city only gave the financing. The responsibility lies with the victor in the tender," spokesman Andrei Kibitov told Interfax.

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