

Painting of Putin Seized; Artist Flees to France

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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ST. PETERSBURG — Police seized a painting of Russia's president and prime minister in women's underwear from a gallery in St. Petersburg, prompting the artist to flee the country.

The artist, Konstanin Altunin, headed to France to request asylum, Tatyana Titova, the director of the museum that hosted the paintings, told The Associated Press. Police said they had taken the paintings from the “Museum of Power” gallery late Monday after receiving reports they were illegal.

The officers also removed a picture of the head of the Russian Orthodox Church, his torso covered in tattoos, and two others poking fun at lawmakers who have backed legislation banning so-called gay propaganda, gallery staff said.

The police statement did not specify which law had been violated, but Russia has a law against

insulting authorities — an offense that carries a maximum one-year prison term.

One painting showed President Vladimir Putin wearing a tight-fitting slip and brushing the hair of Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev, who is depicted with breasts and wearing women's underwear and a bra.

St. Petersburg deputy Vitaly Milonov, whose face was combined with the gay rights movement's rainbow flag in one of the paintings, said the images were inappropriate and "of a distinctly pornographic character."

St. Petersburg, which next week hosts world leaders at a G20 summit, was one of the first Russian cities to introduce a law banning the spread of "gay propaganda."

The Russian parliament has also adopted similar legislation, prompting protests from abroad and calls for a boycott of the Winter Olympics, which Russia will host in the Black Sea resort of Sochi in February.

Gallery owner Alexander Donskoi said the officers had also shut down his establishment and gave him no explanation for the removal of paintings from the exhibition, titled "Leaders."

"This is an [illegal] seizure," he said. "We have been given no formal documents banning us from operating and no receipt confirming our petty cash was seized."

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