



TO RUSSIA WITH LOVE К РОССИИ С ЛЮБОВЬЮ

Montreal artists make a stand
for the Russian LGBTQ community

The project **To Russia with love** has come to be by the realization that the real moral imperative is not to remain passive on the face of hatred and injustice. That's how a group of Montreal artists and collaborators came together to make a stand against the recent wave of institutionalized homophobia and the ruthless violence that exists in Russia towards our gender diverse brothers and sisters.

To Russia with love portrays iconic and historically relevant gay and lesbian Russian with their respective partners, starting from the 19th century to our time. The project features Pyotr Tchaikovsky (composer) and his long time companion Akeksey Sofronov, Anna Yevreinova and Maria Feodorova (reputed lawyer and writer respectively from the 19th century), Sergei Diaghilev (founder of the Ballets Russes in Paris) and Vaslav Nijinsky, a contemporary fictional lesbian couple made of a police woman and an Olympic athlete and lastly a male couple impersonating Stalin and Putin.

The couples are represented on a stage that resembles that of a photography studio in the end of the 19th century. The colors and elements of the image have been chosen carefully to reflect that era as well as the romantic hues of Russian art. We see unequivocally Russian elements, such as the contemporary flag or the St. Petersburg Cathedral and the religious icon. The latter stand as a symbol of the shameful role the church plays on the violence and collective homophobia of Russians.

The project is led by visual artist and photographer **Damian Siqueiros**, who has collaborated with prestigious magazines and clients such as Vogue Mexico, Elle and Les Grands Ballets Canadiens.

Siqueiros and his equally passionate collaborators believe that fighting hatred with hatred is as nonsensical as trying to extinguish a fire with gasoline. The project **To Russia with love** does not seek to condemn those how perpetrate injustice, but to heighten the value of love and to validate the couples and the identities of our Russian brothers and sisters from the LGBTQ community.

This is a particular time in history where Equality in rights for the LGBTQ community in which many modern societies have come to accept and cherish diversity, and on the other hand many others seem to participate in a backlash of enrooted homophobia and political diversions disguised as sanctified morality.

During the next months, the **To Russia with love** Project will be exhibited trough North America. With the help of the New York-based Russian magazine and a fund raising campaign, an exhibition will be presented in that city in June 2014 as a part of the Pride festivities. Montreal will host the exhibition in May 2015 at Galerie Dentaire. In addition, a part of the profits from the sales of the works will be donated to the ONG Russian LGBTQ Network, dedicated to the support of sexual minorities in Russia.

To Russia with love will also benefit from the sponsorship of the gay app Hornet – 2.4 million users worldwide, from which 200 thousand are in Moscow – that will support the promotion of the project. ■