

# DITCHBURN'S SIBERIAN RESIDENCY

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Sylvia Ditchburn in a studio in Russia having a television interview, 2008

One look at well-known local artist Sylvia Ditchburn's face when she speaks about her adventures in various exotic locations around the globe and it is obvious she loves the rewards garnered after years of hard work and study in her arts practice.

A last moment decision to participate in the Austrade 2007 APEC Women in Export Trade Show was the catalyst for her latest excursion, when Curator, Olga Kalinina-Sulakshina of Art and Actuality Tomsk, approached Ditchburn with an offer for her to exhibit at the Tomsk State Art Museum in Russia.

The two exchanged business cards and email addresses, and the task of making the various arrangements necessary for the proposed trip began. A lengthy operation began sorting out details such as letters of invitation, visas, transportation of the paintings to be exhibited and finding out what duties needed to be paid. Eight months later an excited Ditchburn and her husband

Ken were on their way to Siberia.

'Our dream has been realised,' said Ms Kalinina-Sulakshina when she made the call to Ditchburn, confirming that everything was finally in place and flight arrangements could be made.

The show, which featured 20 selected works from Ditchburn's Outback Collection, was opened by the then WA Premier, Alan Carpenter, who was in Tomsk on a trade mission at the time, an extra bonus for Ditchburn, who consequently saw herself featured on the world news.

'We seemed to be a bit like a curiosity,' said Ditchburn, who became the centre of attention, giving talks about Australia and her life as an artist and how this had led to her exhibiting in Russia. Interviewed by television and radio presenters, Ditchburn, who then found herself signing autographs for an admiring public, said 'I felt a bit like a rock star actually.'





Sylvia and Ken Ditchburn at St Basils, Russia, 2008



Tomsk, Russia, 2008



Sylvia and Ken Ditchburn (middle) on a country picnic, Russia, 2008

The artist's work was exhibited from 3 May to 3 June 2008 and during their week in the city, Ditchburn and her husband for themselves welcomed into the studios and homes of the artists in Tomsk, enjoying performances by local folk entertainers, eating picnics in the surrounding countryside and partaking of the food and flavours of Russia. Vodka, fruit, chocolate, cake and coffee were served in abundance, along with other regional specialities.

Known as the city of wood, Tomsk's heritage buildings have carved wooden lace facades and often feature dragons or birds in their design, making them appear quite fairytale-like. Found on the banks of the river Tom, Tomsk is a beautiful city, with tree-lined avenues and numerous galleries to be explored. The surrounding countryside has long been a favourite holiday destination for many Russians who stay in large wooden summer houses called *Dachas*.

As with her experience in China, Ditchburn was welcomed with warmth and friendliness from the local people and beautiful weather continued throughout the trip.

After a week of being feted in Tomsk, the Ditchburns took the opportunity to visit some of Russia's most famous tourist attractions. The Hermitage in St Petersburg and Art Moscow in Russia's capital city were a must and, with former Townsville resident, Ben Slivicki to show them around, the couple found themselves enthralled with the fairytale architecture and the artwork. They also took the opportunity to go to the Bolshoi Ballet, enjoying a performance of *Spartacus* while they were there.

Ditchburn has travelled extensively, being an artist-in-residence within Australia and China, and has sought unusual and exciting locations in which to pursue her love of *Plein-air* painting. With Tomsk being the city of her most recent exhibition, Ditchburn's work is held in collections globally.

The artist's most recent adventure is the move to the Sylvia Ditchburn Fine Art Gallery next to Fired Up North and Market Gallery and Cafe, under the Metro Quays building in Ogdensburg Street. The new venue has been furnished with quiet elegance, with white walls the perfect ground for Ditchburn's vibrant works.

It is intended that the foyer will provide an intimate space in which artists looking for a small but accessible gallery can hold exhibitions.

For more information, contact Sylvia on 07 4724 3953 or visit her at the gallery.

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