

# HYPERALLERGIC

Sensitive to Art & its Discontents

## Mining Lady Liberty's Russian Lineage

by [Olga Zaikina](#) on March 6, 2015



Project 59, Inc. (Irina Danilova with Hiram Levy and Vladimir Seleznev), “Mistress Of Copper Mountain” (2015), 59 disassembled cartons, covered with copper leaf (all images courtesy Irina Danilova and Vladimir Seleznev)

Legend has it that the copper for America’s most famous sculpture — the Statue of Liberty — was produced at the metallurgical factory of Nizhny Tagil, one of the industrial centers of Russia’s Ural region. This story, although well-known in Urals, is hardly ever heard in New York. Despite, or better due to, the hazy scholarship on this issue, it has become a source for an art exhibition, [Skin of Liberty: Fractured and re-Structured](#), held in the [Brooklyn Fire Proof Temporary Storage Gallery](#) in Bushwick.

*Skin of Liberty* is the fourth annual exhibition in [Project 59](#)’s *BRURAL* series, which aims to bring together artists from Brooklyn and Russia’s Ural region. This year, the exhibit focuses

on the myth that New York and Nizhny Tagil appear to share around the American national symbol of freedom. A curator of the show, Vladimir Seleznev, chose 26 artists from both cities, whose works, however, are not about uncovering the symbolism of the 1870s statue or claiming Nizhny Tagil's supremacy in its material production. Rather, the exhibition invites the viewer to reflect on myths surrounding the emergence and legacy of industrialization in the two cities.



Vladimir Seleznev, "Meeting of Distant Objects" (2015), newspaper, acrylic, light-accumulating paint

An artist himself, Vladimir Seleznev executed a piece "Meeting Distant Objects" in which an

image of an old Tagil Metallurgical Plant — which supposedly produced copper for the Statue of Liberty — is overlapped with a glowing image of the Statue. The lights in the gallery space alternately illuminate each of the two images. Never actually meeting, they not only highlight the distance between the two cities but also problematize the relationship between industrial history and a path to the ever-glowing and fragile image of freedom in the late 19th century megapolises. Tagil's rich copper mines were depleted a long time ago, and the Tagil factory today has been converted into a museum space, like many other industrial sites in New York.

The two cities' heritage of an industrial past meanders throughout several works. In Oleg Blyabyas' video, a lone, white sail floats slowly in a tranquil landscape, which appears to be a Nizhny Tagil old, giant crater left after an output of ore two centuries ago and now filled with toxic waste waters by the surrounding factories. Coincidentally, the *Skin of Liberty* exhibit is inconspicuously located two blocks from Newton Creek, a site designated by EPA as one of the most polluted in the United States due to New York's industrialization.



Kenneth Pietrobono, "Industry, Extraction, Displacement" (2015), outdoor public installation

On the facade of the gallery, itself a former industrial site, Kenneth Pitrobono's public installation "Industry, Extraction, Displacement" raises political and social critique of post-industrial conditions. The exhibit, however, is not so much interested in presenting what is right and what is wrong, as much as in inviting the viewer to contemplate connections between the past and present of urban life. A copper flower sculpture by Project 59 members suggests this connection: the piece, made of disassembled cartons and covered with copper

leaves, is reassembled into a futuristic installation. By reworking Ural folklore stories, the work explores the possibilities and limits of industrial, mythical, and artistic production.



Kate Stone, "The Wholly Human Security of Two Earth-Clotted Hands (or How I Learned to Accept That Things Would Never be the Same)" (2012), archival inkjet print, grid of 25 prints, concrete installation

Material and symbolic transformations in urban landscapes activate memory and question the familiar. In a site-specific project "The Wholly Human Security of Two Earth-Clotted Hands," Kate Stone attempts to recreate a replaced sidewalk section near her house in Brooklyn. The viewer is presented with a photo documentation of this recreation, the artifact itself, and a pseudo-archaeological catalogue of the section's fragments. The exaggerated preciousness of a banal material fragment of the city's texture playfully highlights the overlaps of private and public spaces in the urban environment.

In light of historical progression, political and social ideals, and mythic interventions, *Skin of Liberty: Fractured and Re-Structured* presents the viewer with several coinciding discourses of urban life in New York and Nizhny Tagil. The copper of the Statue of Liberty offers more than just a connection through its material history. It welcomes the viewer to reflect on what art can present when facts or words are uncertain. As a result, the real interaction between two cities occurs within aesthetic and artistic experiment.



Alberto Marcos Bursztyn, "Utilitarian Liberty" (2015), mixed media, 25' utility lamps, pigeon spikes

[Skin of Liberty: Fractured and re-Structured](#) continues at the [Brooklyn Fire Proof](#)

[Temporary Storage Gallery](#) through March 8.



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