

# GES-2-----V

## GES-2 House of Culture opens to the public on 4 December

V-A-C Foundation's new permanent site in Moscow, 'GES-2 House of Culture', will open its doors to the public on 4 December 2021.

GES-2 House of Culture is a disused power station, built in 1907, situated on the Bolotnaya Embankment in the popular Red October district in the centre of Moscow. After its acquisition by V-A-C in 2015, Renzo Piano Building Workshop were commissioned to design the conversion of the main building and adjacent area, based on the intention to preserve the original building as much as possible and turn it into a new urban cultural space.

GES-2 House of Culture is an accessible space for people to meet and experience culture together, featuring a cinema and concert hall, a library, shops, a restaurant and café, a playground, workshops, studios and an artist residency block, exhibition halls and an auditorium for public events and performances.

GES-2 aspires to re-imagine traditional Russian 'houses of culture', recreational centres that first came about in the late 19th century and which are still popular today. These cultural spaces set out to encourage people to engage with the arts and actively participate in culture. GES-2 aims to do the same, inviting artists from a wide variety of disciplines: choreography, music, theatre, cinema, design and visual arts to work together and act as a storyteller. The first story, entitled *Holy Barbarians*, will develop over five seasons exploring the territory of modern Russian culture, engaging concepts such as 'truth', 'mother' and 'cosmos', clichés through which Russia is often perceived. GES-2 will invite artists and audiences alike to make sense of these ideas and provide them with new form and meaning.

GES-2 House of Culture opens with the season, *Santa Barbara* (4 December 2021 – 13 March 2022), named after the first Western soap opera that aired on Russian television for a whole decade, from 1992 to 2002. It was widely popular and is said to have had a significant impact on the shaping of post-Soviet life.

*Santa Barbara – A Living Sculpture* by Ragnar Kjartansson is the key project of the season, a durational performance by Icelandic artist Ragnar Kjartansson. Together with the director Ása Helga Hjörleifsdóttir and a Russian cast and crew, Kjartansson will reshoot 98 episodes of the soap opera in Russian, in front of a live audience while also streaming the footage in a special area. Viewers are invited to travel back to the early days of post-Soviet Russia through the performance, and to reflect on the images, values and ideas that have survived and are still relevant today.

Two exhibitions are presented at GES-2 alongside *Santa Barbara*. The first, *When Gondola Engines Were Taken to Bits: A Carnival in Four Acts*, owes its title to the song *Carnival.net* by legendary Russian rock band *Mumiy Troll* and comprises an exhibition, a rave, a series of stand-up shows and a dance procession. It presents new work by Russian artists who are turning to carnival culture today, combining images, costumes and staged photographs from the last thirty years. In the 1990s, these works crossed the boundaries of expression and marked a new era in what was considered acceptable in the public display of one's identity.

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Ragnar Kjartansson and Ingibjörg Sigurjónsdóttir curate another exhibition of the season, entitled *To Moscow! To Moscow! To Moscow!* The project brings together Kjartansson's own work and the works of other artists that he admires, bringing to light artists' bond, dialogue and influence. The title of the exhibition refers to a famous line from Anton Chekhov's play *Three Sisters*, a repeated plea to leave for the big city, and a metaphor for the thirst for change and the urge to fill one's life with meaning.

The first season also includes learning and public programmes designed to further explore the main themes in Ragnar Kjartansson's work and the overall season.

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## Notes to Editors

### Ragnar Kjartansson – artist, musician (b.1976, Reykjavik, Iceland)

Ragnar Kjartansson draws on the entire arc of art in his performative practice. The history of film, music, theatre, visual culture and literature find their way into his video installations, durational performances, drawing and painting. Pretending and staging become key tools in the artist's attempt to convey sincere emotion and offer a genuine experience to the audience.

Kjartansson's work has been exhibited widely. Recent solo exhibitions and performances have been held at the Kunstmuseum Stuttgart, Metropolitan Museum of Art New York, Barbican Art Gallery in London, Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden in Washington DC, Reykjavik Art Museum, Palais de Tokyo in Paris, and New Museum in New York. Kjartansson represented Iceland at the Venice Biennale, and in 2013 his work was featured at the Biennale's main exhibition, *The Encyclopedic Palace*. Kjartansson was born in 1976 in Reykjavik and studied at the Iceland Academy of the Arts and The Royal Academy, Stockholm.

### GES-2 House of Culture

The GES-2 House of Culture is a new urban cultural space occupying a total area of two hectares (150 m x150 m).

#### GES-2 Building (34,400 sq m)

The GES-2 building consists of 5 parts: the front building, the main building, the right and left wings and the auditorium.

#### 1. Front building

The front part of the building, facing the embankment, houses the Square: one of the main entrances to GES-2. This is a meeting point, a place where visitors can find out more about the House of Culture's programmes. A library is located above the Square.

#### 2. Right Wing

The right wing is designed for Russian and overseas artists taking part in residential programmes run by GES-2. It contains accommodation units and spaces for collaborative work.

#### 3. Left Wing

The left wing comprises a restaurant and offices.

#### 4. Main Building

Level 1 houses the Prospekt, the central walkway of GES-2, where visitors can move freely. Located around the Prospekt are spaces designed for art and learning programmes. The Prospekt is adjoined by a café, shops and the Auditorium.

Level -1 houses the main exhibition spaces with natural lighting. A walk through the exhibition halls takes visitors to the Vault workshops.

#### Storage and Restoration Workshops

The total area is 2,500 sq m. This includes the following.

#### 5. The Auditorium

The Auditorium is a convertible cinema and concert hall with 10 different stage configurations, which can seat up to 420 people. The space is designed for lectures, theatre productions, concerts and film screenings. Also based here is the city cinema GES-2 Kino.

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## Vaults (2,000 sq m)

The Vaults Art Production Centre is situated in a 19th-century building once owned by the prominent industrialist Petr Smirnov. Today it houses workshops with high-tech equipment, which can be used by creatives specialising in various disciplines. There are woodwork, metal, textile and ceramic workshops, as well as a photo laboratory, silkscreen printing and 3D printing studios, an audio and a video recording studio.

## Grove

Planted on an artificial hill with a built-in complex irrigation system, the Grove has more than 600 birch trees and 80,000 bush plants. A footpath running through the Grove leads to the Outdoor Platform observation deck.

## Pedestrian Area (10,000 sq m)

At the rear of the GES-2 House of Culture building sits the Courtyard, where film screenings and concerts will be held in the summer. Below the Courtyard and the Grove, there is a two-level, 200-space car park. The upper level will also be used for concerts and rave parties.

Below the Car Park is the GES-2 Storage facility, with a total area of 2,000 sq m.

## Environmental sustainability

GES-2 aims to qualify for a gold LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) certificate, and is officially rated as an environmentally friendly and sustainable building.

GES-2 is proactive in its use of renewable energy sources.

- PV solar panels installed on the roof of the building, totalling 5,000 sq m, will regularly generate part of the building's electricity consumption.
- The 70-metre-tall chimneys at GES-2 are now used to convey cleaner air present at higher altitudes.
- The car park has charging points for eight electric vehicles.
- The building will have a system installed for collecting and purifying rain water. The collected water can be used in the bathrooms and for plant irrigation, so as to save natural resources.

GES-2's capacity is 2,000 visitors.

The GES-2 complex is equipped with 30 lifts and floating platforms.

Access to the GES-2 House of Culture will be free at all times, and the majority of events will be free of charge.

The building has four above-ground floors and two underground floors, with an underground area of 23,000 sq m.

The GES-2 House of Culture comprises the following:

- artists residency block
- Library
- Auditorium
- classrooms
- exhibition spaces
- shops
- restaurant with a capacity of 100
- three cafés
- Vaults
- Bread-2 bakery

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