

Parks and roubles

It's my first day in Moscow and I need to get roubles. The hotel I am staying at instructs me on how to find a bank. The lobby is spacious and shiny and I am not sure which facility I have entered. I ask someone if I can exchange currency and they take me to another room with two women behind a desk, who introduce me to a third door. After passing through a small waiting room with a sofa, a sliding door with a button brings me to a window counter. Two men in front of me take twenty minutes to finish: they carry suitcases and the counting machines are in constant motion. Two flat screens show me boats, luxury locations and offshore banking ads.

I am in Russia to contribute to a curatorial summer school and I am new to the country. I notice hammer and sickles everywhere: on the cuffs of the uniforms worn by flight attendants, the queue and security checks to get to Lenin's cenotaph, [Boris Nemtsov's](#) spontaneous memorial on the bridge by the Kremlin where he was assassinated and the golden palaces of the tzars in Saint Petersburg, all representing fragments of a layered and bloody history.

Russia feels like being in a dream. I especially enjoy the Muscovite parks: maybe it has to do with reading [Dostoyevsky's White Nights](#) on the plane, or the nice weather attracting many people to engage in various outdoors activities. In Gorky Park I visit [Garage](#) in its new Rem Koolhaas shell. The modest size and intuitive arrangement of the museum surprises me. The shows are varied. I spend time at one in particular on the [American pavilion at the Moscow international exhibition of 1959](#) which repurposes literature, photographs and TV news from the time as an exercise in cultural diplomacy. It also contains reproductions of some of the original exhibits, as well as the photographic show known as [The Family of Man](#).

On another day, making intuitive guesses about the cyrillic alphabet and paying attention to the announcements in the imposing metro stations, I make my way to VDNKh (ВДНХ) - the Exhibition of National Economic Achievements - a huge park where signs and symbols of socialism and capitalism now coexist as public monuments: from pavilions, to Lenin statues, funfair spaceships and life-size planes.

Back home, I receive a phone call from my bank asking if I am expecting a

payment. They need to verify what I have been doing, since the money has gone through the Virgin Islands and Switzerland before reaching my account. Teaching in Russia is adventurous.

[*Face-to-Face: The American National Exhibition in Moscow, 1959/2015*](#), Field Research Project, Garage, Gorky Park, Moscow, June 12 - August 23, 2015.

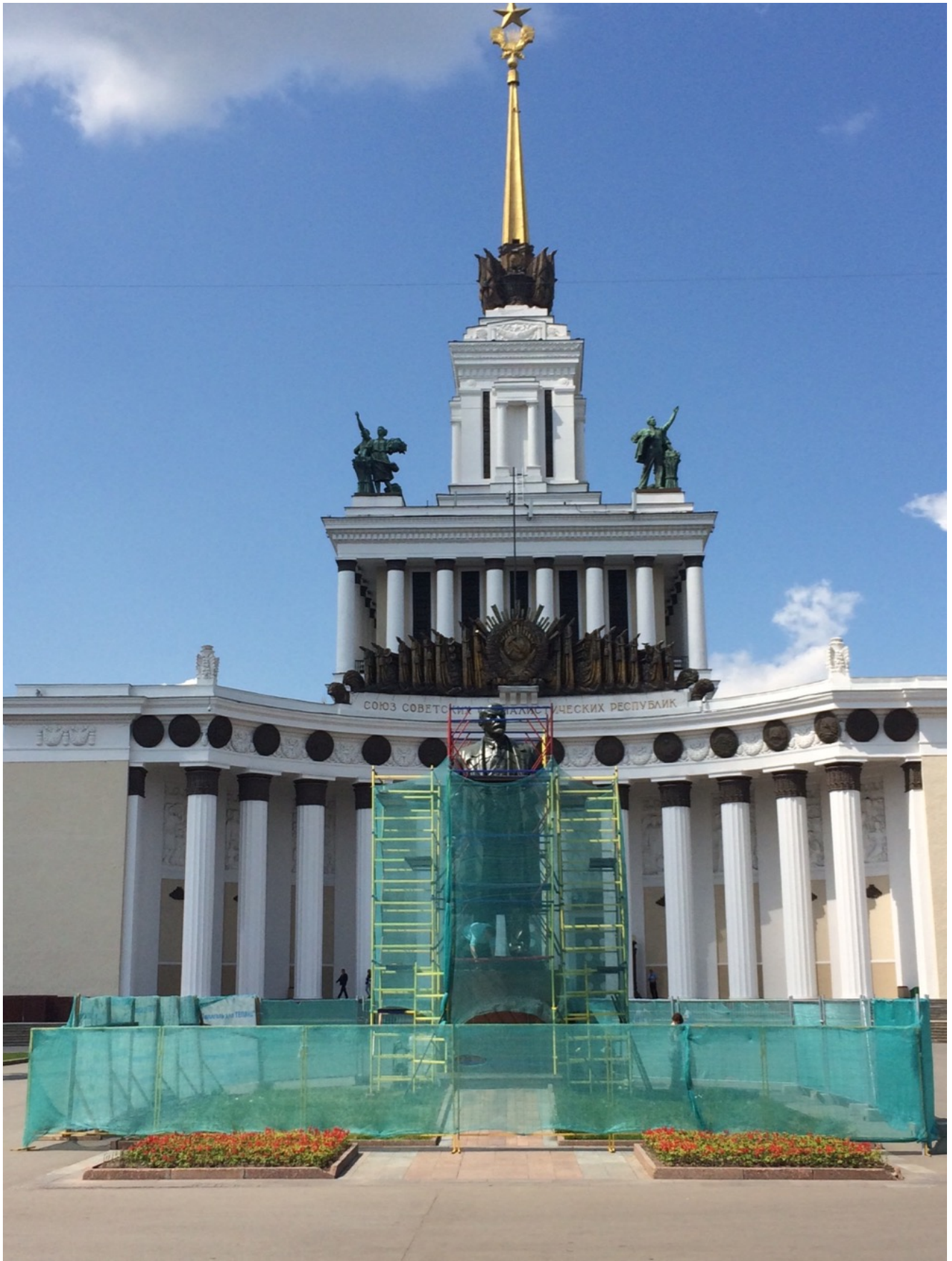
[*VDNKh - the Exhibition of National Economic Achievements*](#), The All-Russian Exhibition Centre, Moscow.



Visitors stream into the American National Exhibition in Moscow in 1959



Interior of the American National Exhibition in Moscow



Scaffolding with Lenin Statue at VDNKh. Photo: Caterina Riva



Glimpse of VDNKh. Photo: Caterina Riva