

Into Russia On a Wing and a Poem

By Carey Scott
THE MOSCOW TIMES

When Dutch poet René Seghers started tinkering with a poem in 1987 set in the shape of fused rings, he never dreamed that six years later, he would be carrying his words and their form to people along a route stretching from western Ireland to eastern Japan, stopping in 508 towns along the way.

But Seghers, 28, says that one day he was "moonstruck" with the idea of having people from all over the world recite his poem in their own language.

"It is an expression of hope that all people will become brothers," said Seghers.

After three years of organizing and collecting funds from sponsors including Polaroid and Dutch cultural centers, he is now in Moscow, ready to embark on the toughest leg of his travels.

Last summer he recorded the citizens of Ireland, Wales, England and Holland on film as they repeated his words, and on Friday, he leaves for Japan, where he will visit 33 towns and find an inhabitant in each town to recite the poem in Japanese, in front of his video camera.

From there he will make his way back to Moscow via Vladivostok and China, filming and taking photos all along the journey. He carries with him a long map on which his route is charted by a red line stretching from Clifden, Ireland to Tokyo.

For Seghers, the point of the journey is not for others to see his poem — which when written down appears in a union of ying and yang symbols in four different colors — but for their voices and faces to "display the bond that unites mankind through language," he says.

He readily acknowledges that the words of the poem mean little on their own. Indeed, the entire poem can be read in eight seconds:

Undestined

Listening to his beautiful words,

Carried on the winds,

Saying nothing,

They are undestined, tempting the empty.

"The actual poem," says the poet, "is not the printed pre-form, but the one that contains 508 recitals."

On his return to the Netherlands, Seghers will



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René Seghers writing his poem. He is currently traveling through Russia on his way to Tokyo via Siberia.

display photographs of the participants and show the video documentary of his trip.

Seghers, a philosophy graduate, is accompanied by his friend Huib Kraayeveld, 22, a psychology student. The pair are lugging around a sizeable load of technical equipment, including an expensive video camera — a source of concern to the two, who are worried that they may become the target of thieves.

It is difficult for the pair to predict what their reception will be like in small Siberian towns. "It will be very important for us to make contacts with the local people," says Seghers.

During his previous trip to Ireland, Seghers says he found people very willing to cooperate with the project.

"But in England they were more suspicious," says Seghers. "They were afraid we would rob them or something."

One obstacle they will have to overcome in the wilds of Siberia will be that of transport. They believe they will be unable to travel on trains because "the train doesn't stop at all the places along the route," says Seghers. "Maybe we will hire a car, maybe we will buy one."

Kraayeveld, however, admits that "I don't want to drive a Lada all the way around Russia."

The two speak no Russian and as yet have no contacts outside Moscow.

"Do you have any friends in Vladivostok?" Seghers asks hopefully.