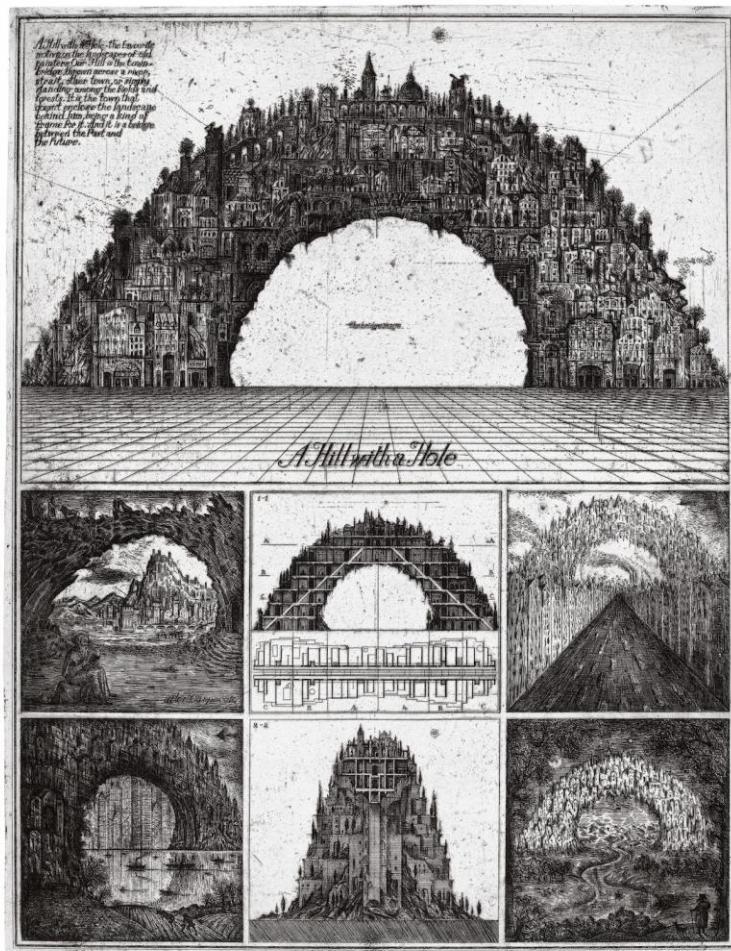


The Most Fantastic Architecture of the Soviet Union Was Built on Paper

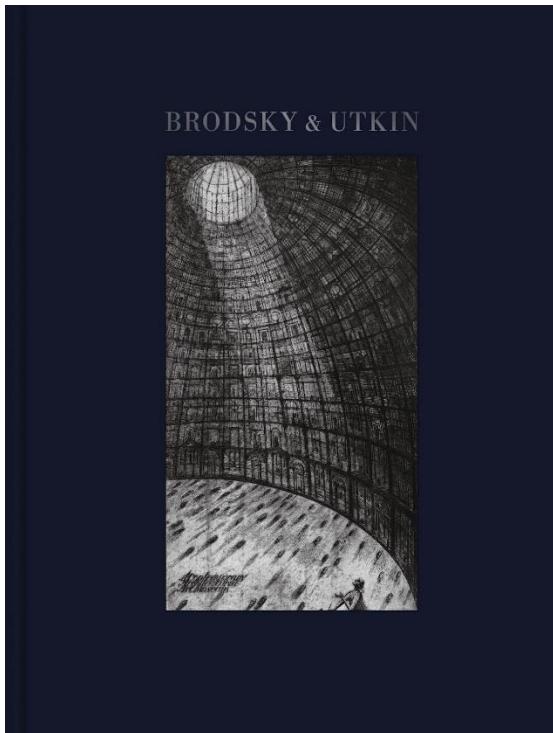
by Allison Meier on September 8, 2015



Alexander Brodsky and Ilya Utkin, "Hill with a Hole" (1987/90) (courtesy of Ronald Feldman Fine Arts Inc)

Restricted by the aesthetic limits on architecture in the Soviet Union, Alexander Brodsky and Ilya Utkin imagined the most fantastic cities and wondrous structures on paper. From 1978 until the end of their partnership in 1993, Brodsky and Utkin

collaborated on etchings dense with precarious scaffolding, classical domes, huge glass towers, and other visionary architecture that referenced everything from ancient tombs to Le Corbusier's sprawling city plans.



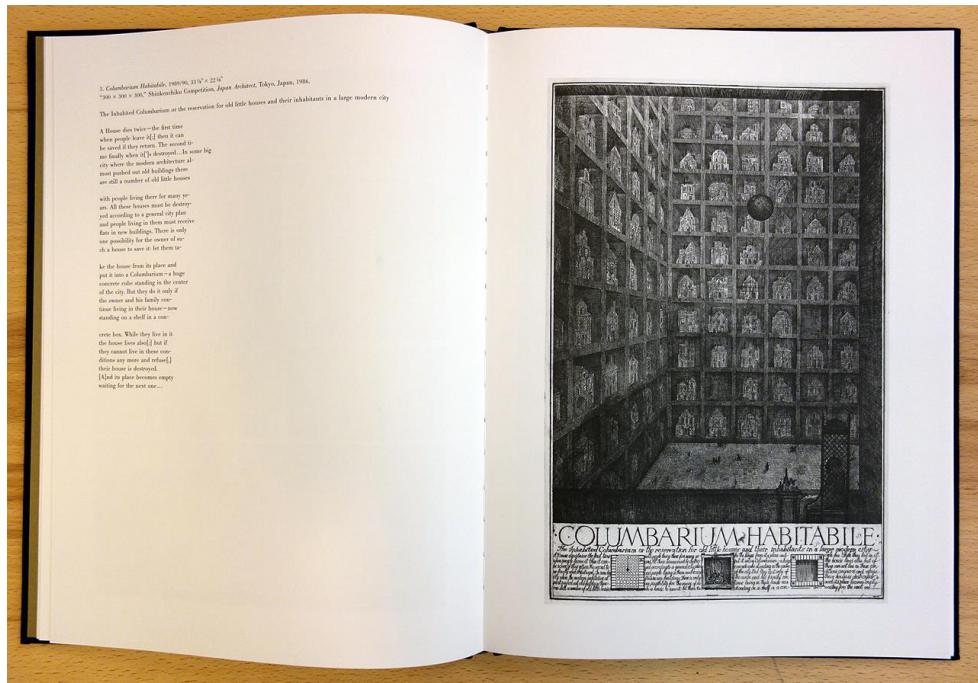
Cover of 'Brodsky & Utkin' (courtesy Princeton Architectural Press) (click to enlarge)

This month, Princeton Architectural Press is releasing the third edition of *Brodsky & Utkin*. First published in 1991 and reprinted in 2003, the book's illustrations are shadowy manifestations of urban landscapes somewhere between a dream and a chaotic future, where all the history of architecture collides. Brodsky and Utkin's prints are also currently on view at the Tate Modern in London as part of the ongoing *Poetry and Dream* displays from the museum collections. Gallerist Ronald Feldman, who first sold their work in the United States, writes in a preface:

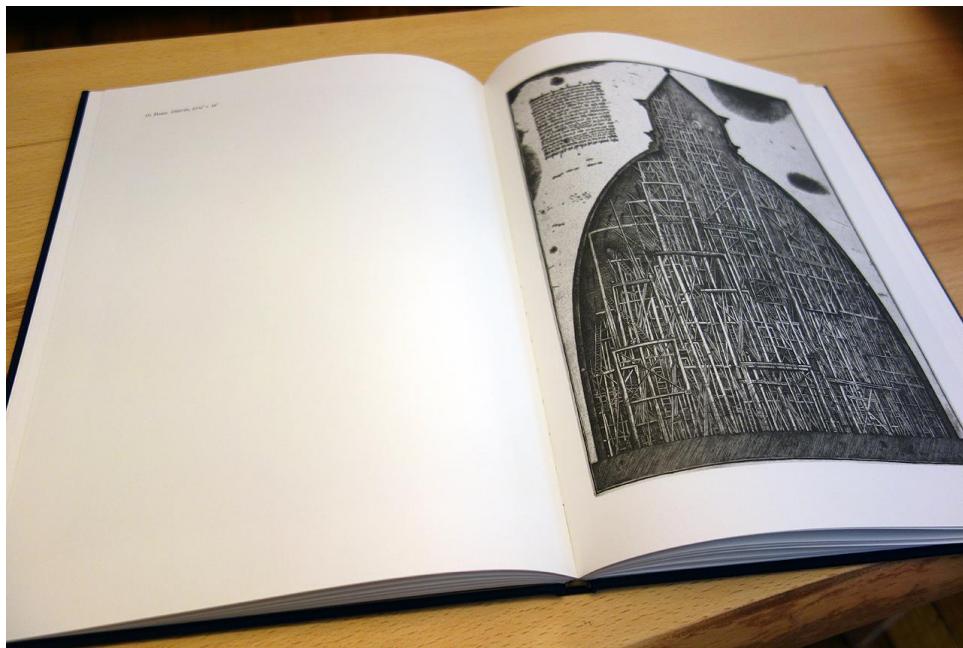
What do you do as an architect living in a country that sets limits on and penalties

for architectural design? [...] During the Cold War, the brave and inventive architects of the Soviet Union did not cease to advance their cause. They continued to explore their ideas in several ways, including one very simple but dangerous method: they drew what they couldn't build, and thus invented paper architecture.

In an introduction, author Lois Beckett calls their paper architecture a "graphic form of architectural criticism." Beckett adds that Brodsky, Utkin, and others "began producing visionary schemes in response to a bleak professional scene in which only artless and ill-conceived buildings, diluted through numerous bureaucratic strata and constructed out of poor materials by unskilled laborers, were being erected — if anything."



Inside 'Brodsky & Utkin' (photo of the book for Hyperallergic)



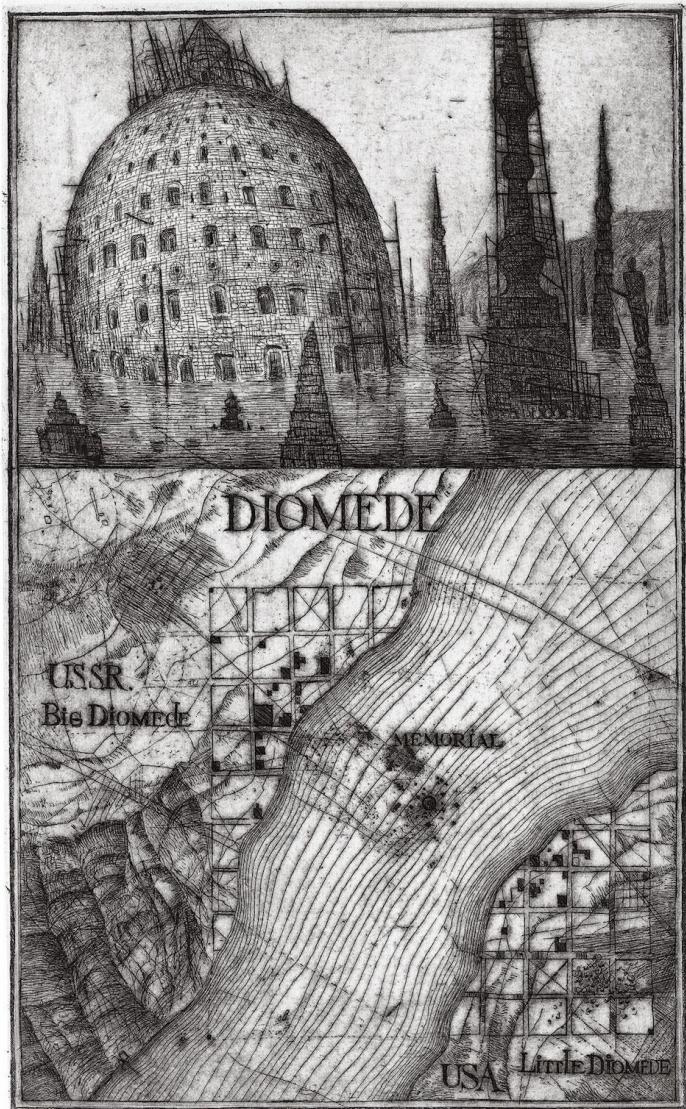
Inside 'Brodsky & Utkin' (photo of the book for Hyperallergic)

In their “Columbarium Architecture (Museum of Disappearing Buildings” (1984/90), for instance, they borrowed a structure for holding urns, and filled with with miniatures of demolished historic architecture. Often nostalgic designs appear in their illustrations, such as “Bridge” (1987/90) with a classically-domed glass chapel wedged over a

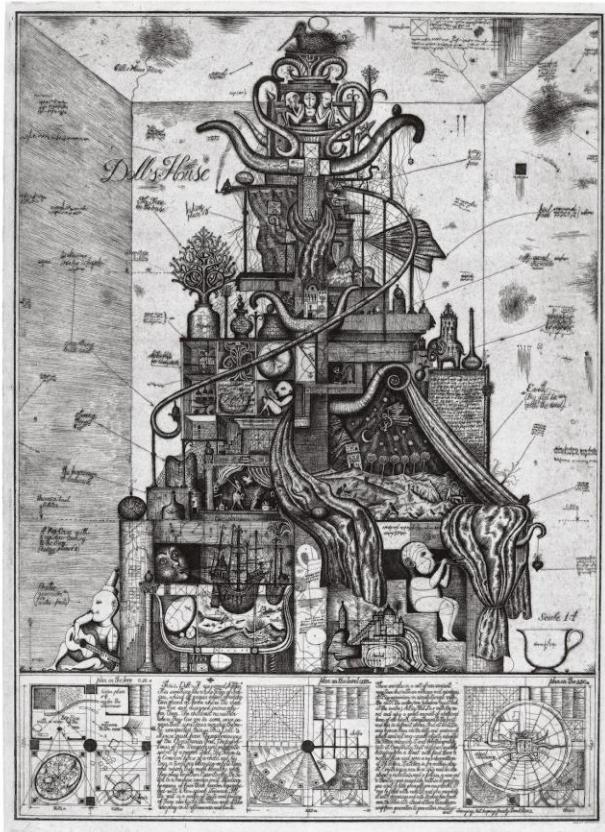
crevice, where you can stand “over the fathomless endless crack, between two abysses — upper and lower.”

Even without the Cold War context, a contemporary viewer can get lost in the elaborate and often whimsical creations. They’re similar to the futuristic drawings of the late Lebbeus Woods in marveling at the chaos and potential of human ingenuity, and the impossible, mind-bending “Library of Babel” imagined by Jorge Luis Borges. Both Brodsky and Utkin studied at the Moscow Institute of Architecture in the 1970s, inspired by Russian history and folklore (a wandering egg that seems to have rolled out of an Eastern Orthodox Easter regularly appears), along with all the international material they could get their hands on, including the 18th-century etchings of fictional architecture by Giovanni Battista Piranesi, and writings on utopian ideals of the past centuries.

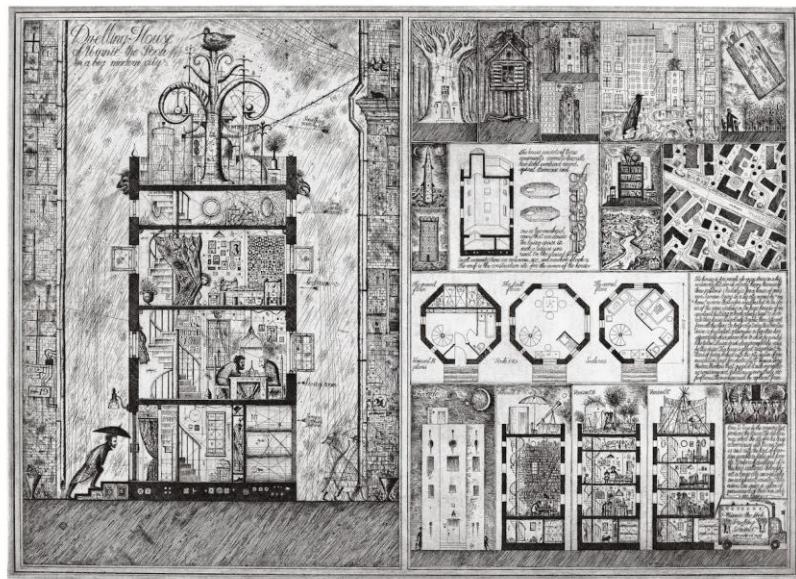
Looking at the images today, there is resonance with the enduring alienation of huge cities, and the desire for some presence in the fray. In “Glass Tower II” (1984/90), the accompanying text reads: “Why does a Man build a tower? [...] to shout as loud as possible: ‘Here I am! Look how strong and mighty I am.’” In the etching, a huge glass cylindrical tower allows any humble human to walk up its staircase and be projected large, transformed momentarily into a godlike giant, standing above the anonymity of the city below.



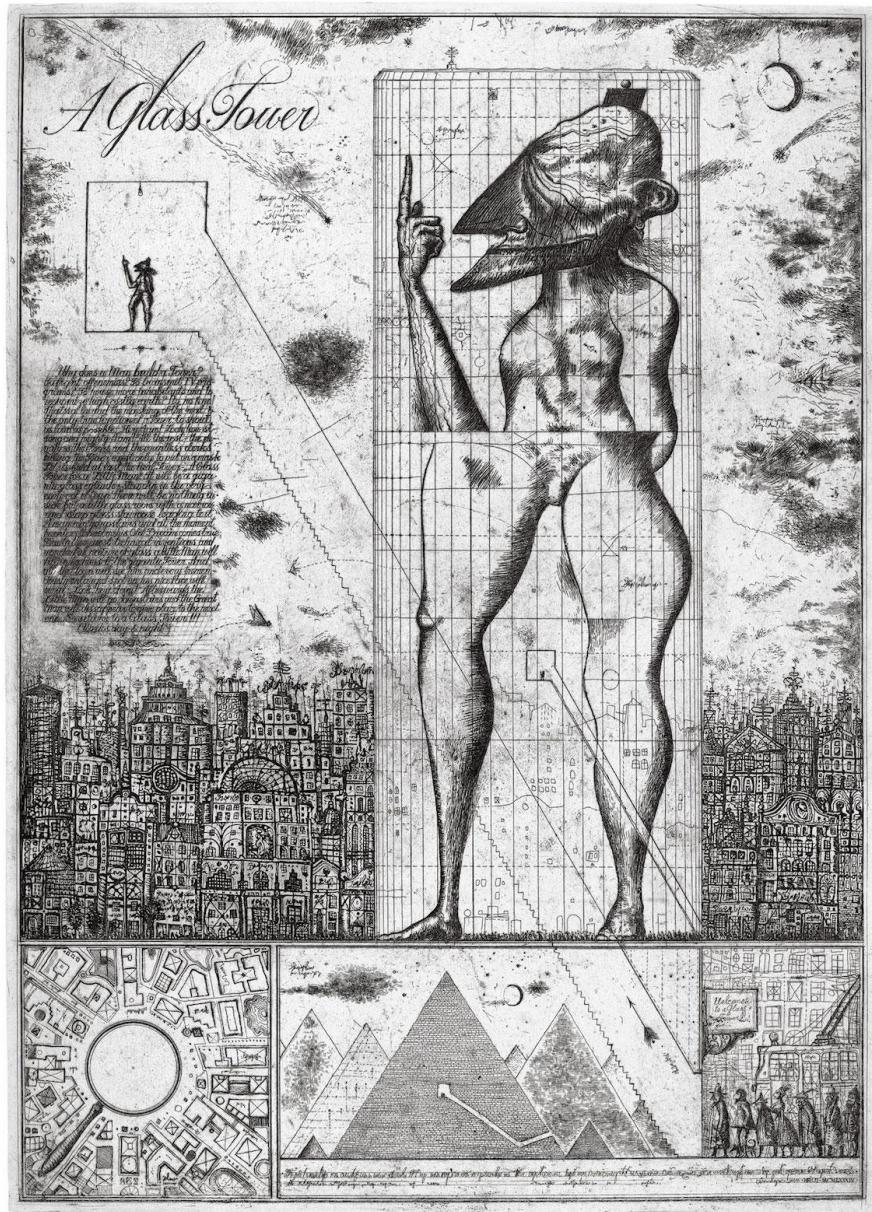
Alexander Brodsky and Ilya Utkin, "Diomedé" (1989/90) (courtesy of Ronald Feldman Fine Arts Inc)



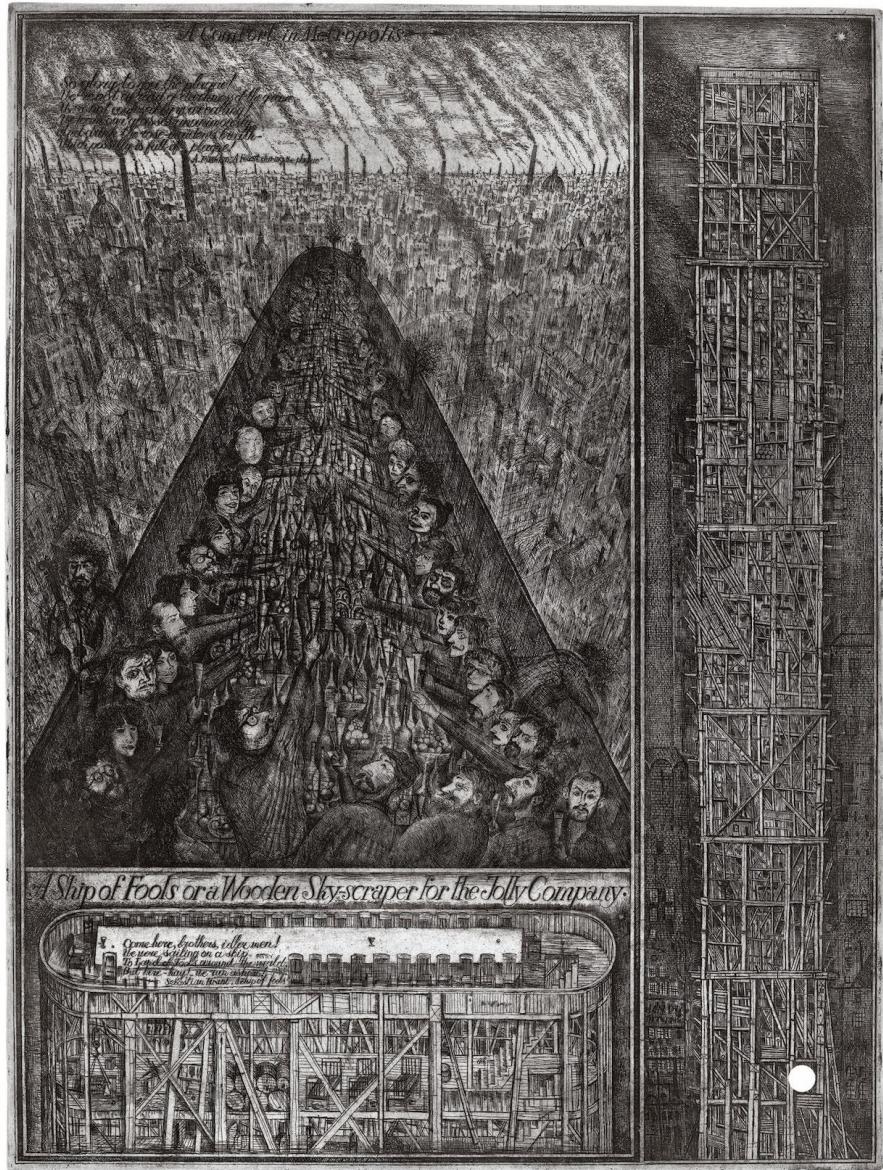
Alexander Brodsky and Ilya Utkin, "Doll's House" (1990) (courtesy of Ronald Feldman Fine Arts Inc)



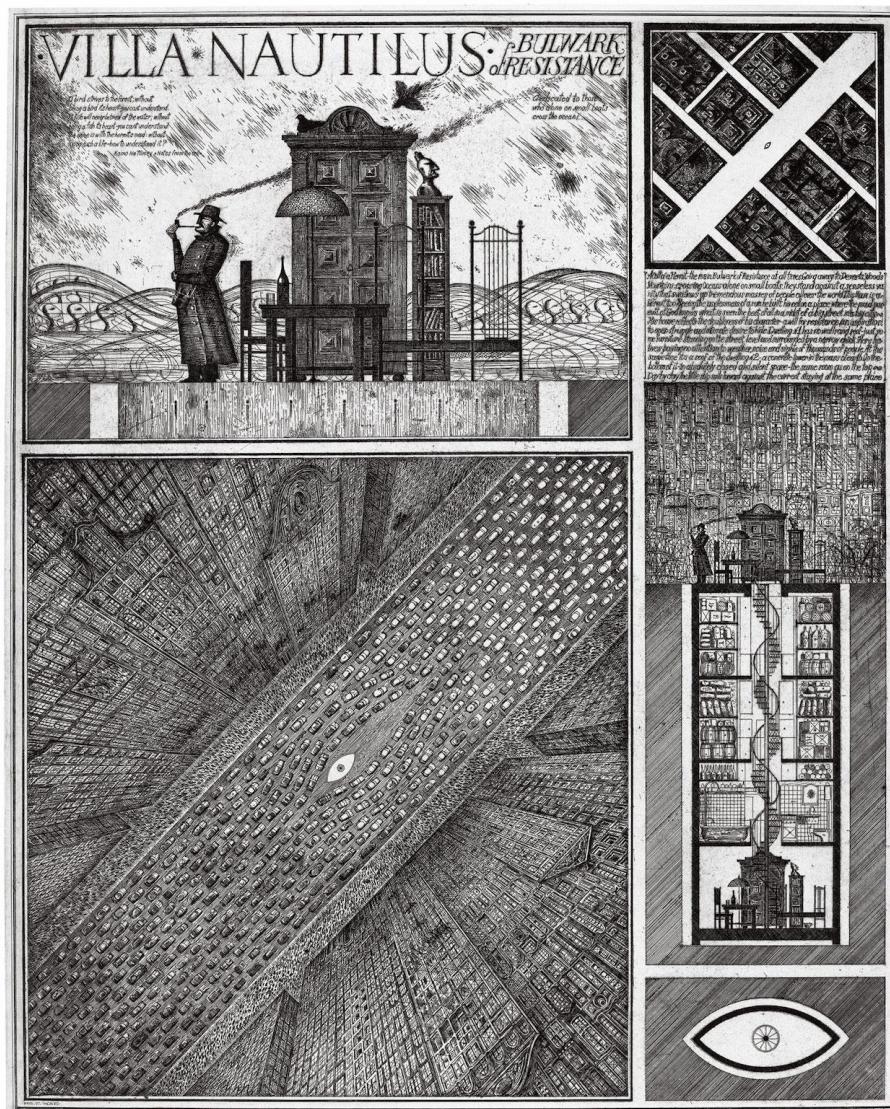
Alexander Brodsky and Ilya Utkin, "Dwelling House of Winnie-the-Pooh" (1990) (courtesy of Ronald Feldman Fine Arts Inc)



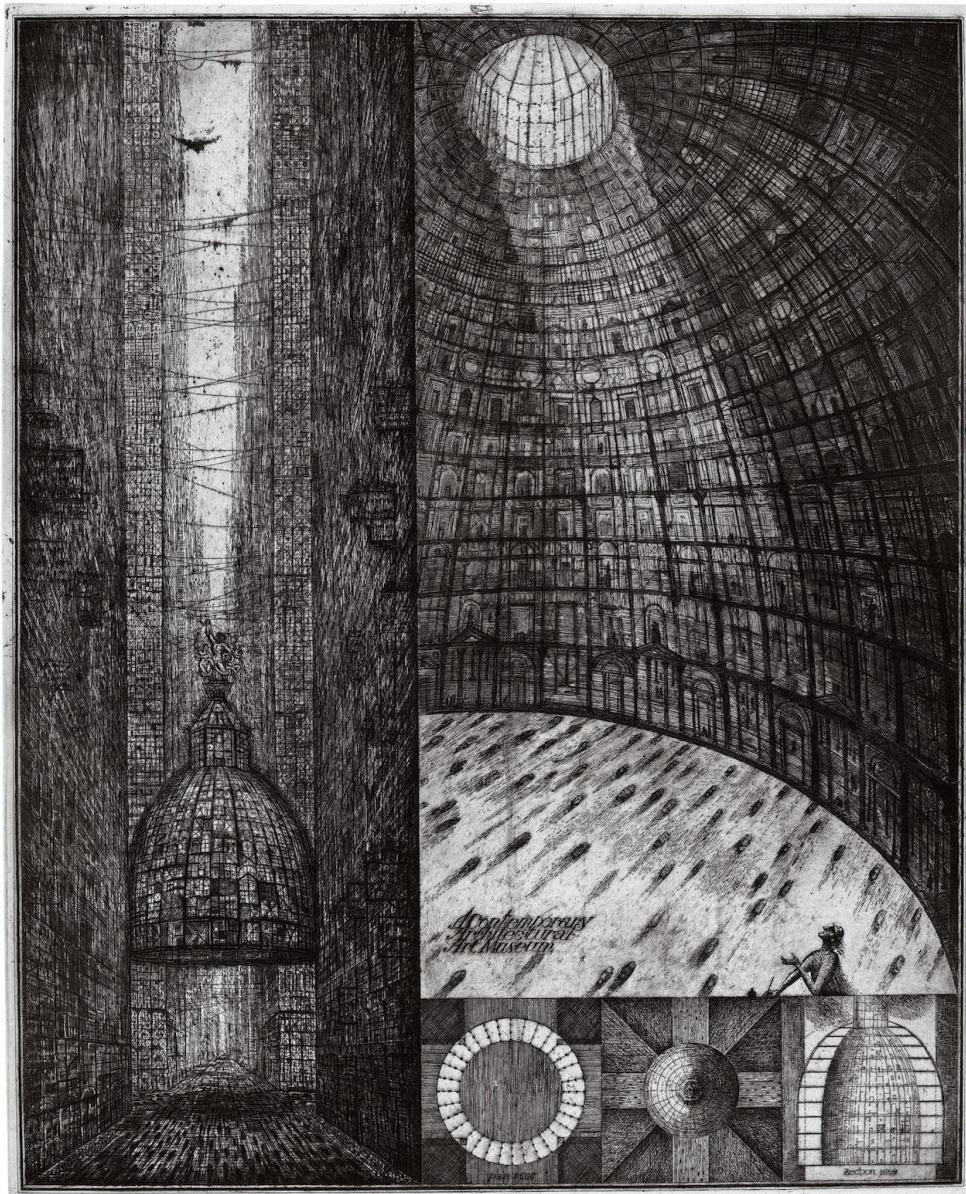
Alexander Brodsky and Ilya Utkin, "Glass Tower II" (1984/90) (courtesy of Ronald Feldman Fine Arts Inc)



Alexander Brodsky and Ilya Utkin, "Ship of Fools or a Wooden Skyscraper for the Jolly Company" (1988/90) (courtesy of Ronald Feldman Fine Arts Inc)



Alexander Brodsky and Ilya Utkin, "Villa Nautilus" (1990) (courtesy of Ronald Feldman Fine Arts Inc)



Alexander Brodsky and Ilya Utkin, "Contemporary Architectural Art Museum" (1988/90) (courtesy of Ronald Feldman Fine Arts Inc)

Brodsky & Utkin is out August 26 from Princeton Architectural Press.

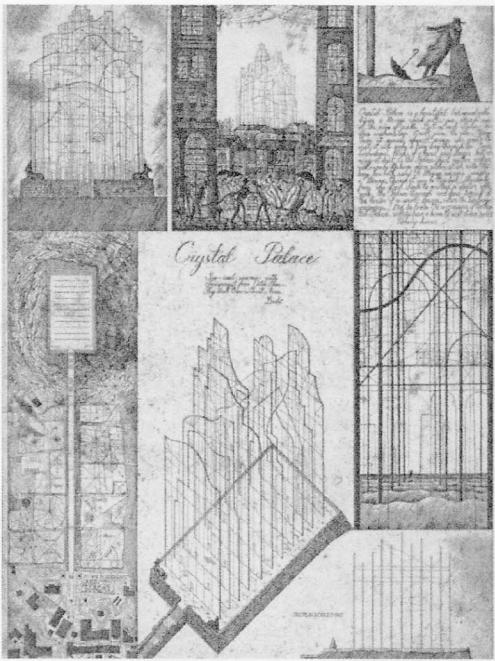


fig. a

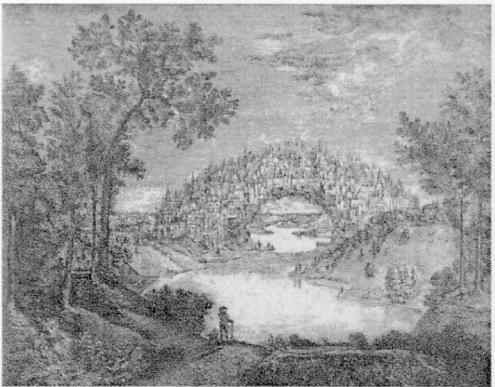


fig. b

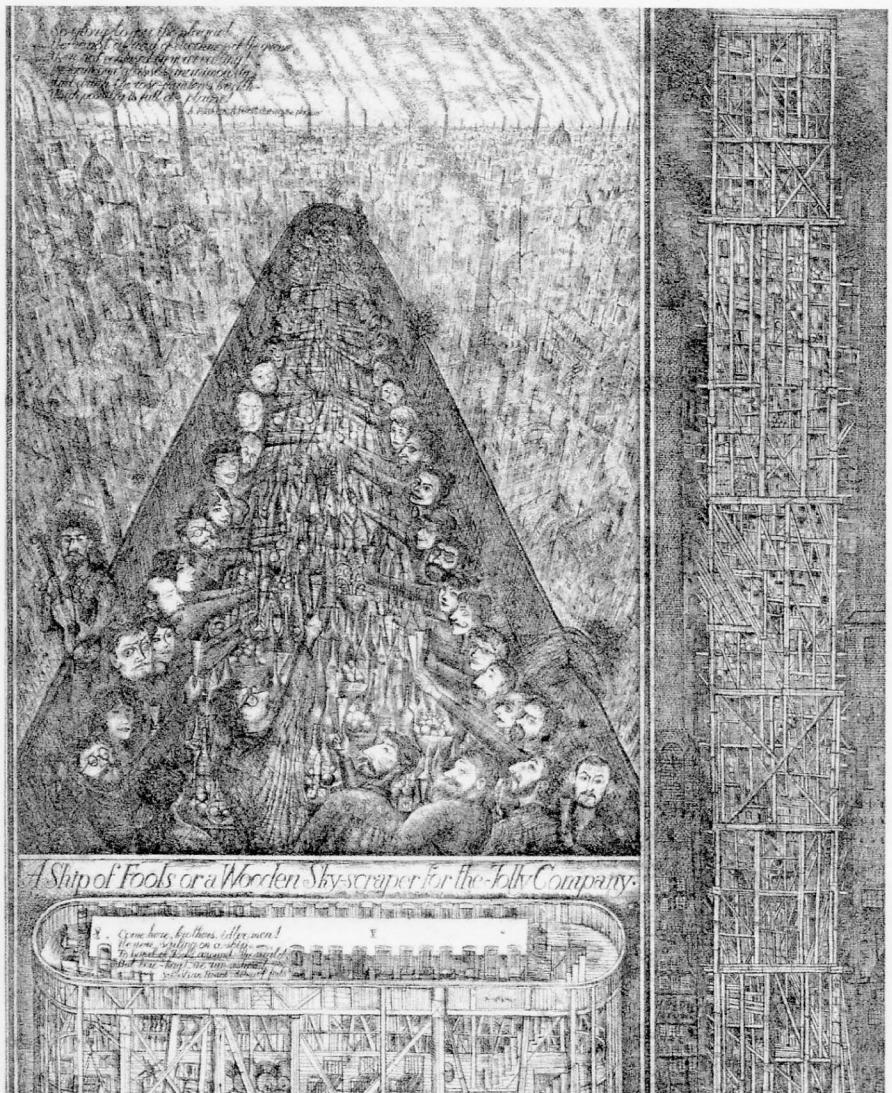


fig. c

Interstices 08 / Erratum Sheet

page 13, Michael Ostwald, fig. a), the caption should read:

Brodsky & Utkin, Crystal Palace, 1989/90 (Plate produced / Plate printed) from Projects portfolio, 1981-90, 35 etchings, ed. of 30, 43 x 31 3/4 inches (F). Courtesy Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, New York. Photo by D. James Dee. [Originally drawn and published in 1982]

page 14, Michael Ostwald, fig. b), the caption should read:

Brodsky & Utkin, Town Bridge, 1984/90 (Plate produced / Plate printed) from Projects portfolio, 1981-90, 35 etchings, ed. of 30, 43 x 31 3/4 inches (F). Courtesy Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, New York. Photo by D. James Dee. [Originally drawn and published in 1984]

page 15, Michael Ostwald, fig. c) replaces the fig. on page 15

Brodsky & Utkin, A Ship of Fools, 1988/90 (Plate produced / Plate printed) from Projects portfolio, 1981-90, 35 etchings, ed. of 30, 43 x 31 3/4 inches (F). Courtesy Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, New York. Photo by D. James Dee. [Originally drawn in 1988 and published in 1989]

Our apologies for this mistake

Sincerely yours,
Interstices Team

THE INDEPENDENT WEEKLY

Egg-ceptional

By Kate Dobbs Ariail

I had seen the photo of the "egg"—the Alexander Brodsky and Ilya Utkin sculpture of a man pushing a giant egg-shaped thing—and I had seen the photo of the egg, and I had seen it yet again, as if that were the only object of significance in the exhibition it was being used to advertise.

If it weren't my job to go to art shows, I probably would have skipped *Russian Conceptual Art of the 1980s: The Collection of the Duke*

University Museum of Art, currently on view at that museum; because I was already sick of that damn egg. And that would have been a terrible shame.

Because the egg is a wonderful piece of sculpture.

Its real title is "Portrait of an Unknown Person or The Nightmare of Carl Fabergé." I'm going to keep calling it the egg. Among sculpture's many purposes are the examination, contemplation and expression of space, volume and mass: The egg makes me aware of how rarely mass and density are explored these days.

This thing has its own gravity. It is, as its makers say, "for those who are tired of plastic vanity, for those who feel sick of foam rubber life, for those who believe in heavy things that are difficult to move..." The sculpture pulls you into its orbit instantly. You feel in your own body its weight and inertia as the figure presses against it. In this age of virtual this and that, when art is taking to the Internet and museums are pouring resources into putting images on computers, this sculpture reinvigorates my faith in actual art objects and the importance of experiencing them with the body, as well as the eyes.

Brodsky and Utkin began collaborating on projects while still studying at the Moscow Architecture Institute. Architectural creativity being disallowed in Communist U.S.S.R., the pair began entering—and winning—design competitions around the world and became known as the Soviet Union's leading "paper architects." In 1984 they entered a competition to design a museum of sculpture, calling their design "Island of Stability."

"Life in cities like Moscow and New York is very hectic, and there are all these lightweight, transitory, ephemeral objects clamoring for our

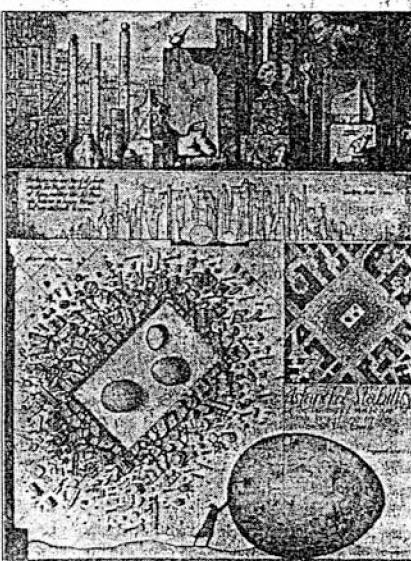
attention," the artists have noted. "This museum was supposed to be a symbol of something genuine, something stable—i.e., a Museum of Stone Sculpture, only stone, set outdoors on a square."

In their design, quantities of stone sculptures surround a sand-filled square, effectively screening out the city. Three huge stone eggs, beautiful natural forms—self-contained, serene and heavy—rest in the square. To the drawing, Brodsky and Utkin added a little man trying to move one of the eggs. Five years later they translated this idea to three dimensions. Now, amazingly, it has come into the collection of the Duke Museum.

As have a number of their remarkable large etchings, including the delightful "Island of Stability." It's as if a couple of architects who had become *New Yorker* cartoonists fell down the rabbit hole and started drawing from a previ-

ously undiscovered viewpoint: The work is surreally funny, humane and very witty. All the etchings consist of multiple architectural images and deal with the human uses of these structures. Many depict buildings as the containers of our lives, or as stages on which the human drama plays, or as symbols of human spirit.

There are a number of other interesting works in the exhibition, though Brodsky and Utkin's are to my mind the most important. Most of this



Alexander Brodsky and Ilya Utkin turned part of their "Island of Stability" etching into the famous "egg" sculpture.

work was made before the collapse of Soviet communism, and much of it is incomprehensible to us without some interpretation because we lack the cultural background (not to mention the Russian-language skills) to get the references. A number of the pieces have little to redeem them in aesthetic terms, but with adequate auxiliary information they can help us form a realistic picture of late Soviet culture. Unfortunately, there is no exhibition catalog and the wall texts and gallery handouts don't give as much information as we need.

Now that museum director Michael Mezzatesta has succeeded in bringing this important group of works into the collection, further enhancing the museum's importance and underlining its vitality, it seems incredible to still be asking the question: When is Duke going to build a real art museum? One where hurried students won't be rushing through the foyer, colliding with absorbed art viewers. One with a raked auditorium large enough to hold the crowds for lectures.

One where the egg can rest heavily in the square, an island of stability in a torrent of artistic froth. ■

RUSSIAN CONCEPTUAL ART OF THE 1980S
Continuing at the Duke University
Museum of Art, East Campus, Duke,
Durham, through March 31. "After
Hours" programs with related lectures
and activities will continue through
February. Call 684-5135.

ART

Conover, Kirsten A. "Building With Paper, Plaster, and Dreams." *The Christian Science Monitor*, January 27, 1994, pp. 10-11.

Building With Paper, Plaster, and Dreams

At a time when Russian architecture was all engineering and no design, two Muscovites kept their imagination flowing – in drawings

By Kirsten A. Conover

Staff writer of The Christian Science Monitor

PORLAND, ORE.

RUSSIAN architects Alexander ("Sasha") Brodsky and Ilya Utkin gained notoriety not from the buildings they created, but from designs that have never been realized.

As "paper architects," they spent a decade working in only two dimensions because of Soviet bureaucracy.

Both sons of architects, Brodsky and Utkin graduated from Moscow's prestigious Institute of Architecture in 1978 with no real opportunity to use their skills. At the time Leonid Brezhnev was in power, architecture was all engineering and no design. In fact, anything that wasn't purely utilitarian, which naturally lent itself to mass production, was considered almost immoral. As beehive-style apartments went up, hope for architects went down.

So Brodsky and Utkin, along with other architects, began to render conceptual projects in the form of etchings on paper. Their group became loosely known as the "paper architects."

An exhibition of Brodsky and Utkin's work (which closed recently at the Portland Art Museum but will travel in part to Tacoma) reveals the scope of their "imaginary" structures.

Because they knew that their projects would never be built, the architects created fantasy buildings, cities, and situations. They also incorporated text with their pictures – a type of stylized poetry that often mused about the future. When these drawings were shown outside the Soviet Union, they won several conceptual-design competitions sponsored by Japanese architecture publications.

In 1982, Brodsky and Utkin's "Crystal Palace" – a design for a glass structure – won first prize in Tokyo's Central Glass Competition and is considered a classic of paper architecture.

At the time, the architects' work served as a kind of commentary, which allowed them to symbolically peck through the shell of frustration caused by Communist constraints. Moreover, they were free from the obstacles of "real" architecture such as building codes and budgets; they did not have to compromise their design.

With *perestroika*, Brodsky and Utkin were able to move into other dimensions. Their world was no longer flat. The pair was commissioned to design the interior of a Moscow cooperative restaurant called the Atrium, which they built

themselves. They continued to show their paper work and did sculpture and installations, such as their monumental egg "Portrait of an Unknown Person or Peter Carl Fabergé's Nightmare."

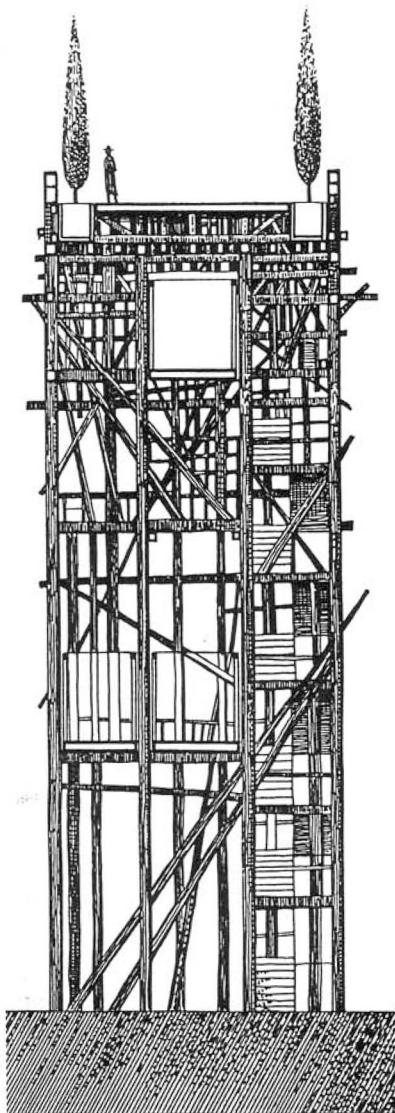
Only in the past several years have Brodsky and Utkin gained international recognition as award-winning conceptual architect-artists. They have exhibited in Europe and the United States, with solo shows in New York, San Diego, and Seattle. The Portland show is considered the first to present the full range of Brodsky and Utkin's work, from their early paper works, sculpture pieces, and a model of their largest "real" design: "Twelfth Street Pedestrian Bridge," which the team has designed for the city of Tacoma, Wash. (See story, left.)

At the Portland exhibition, various etchings surrounded the gargantuan 10-by-14-foot egg. They are given such titles as "Villa Claustrophobia," "A Style for the Year 2001," "A Comfort in Metropolis," and "Wandering Turtle in a Maze of a Big City." The drawings resemble oversized pages from a storybook with intricate renderings of structures and cityscapes, accompanied by beautifully scripted text.

Brodsky and Utkin make numerous references to literature, mythology, and philosophy in their etchings; one is dedicated to the late Italian film director Federico Fellini.

John Weber, curator of the Portland exhibition, writes that in their etchings, "they propose buildings that metaphorically reveal the dreams, hopes, fascinations and fears of late-millennium city-dwellers.... Brodsky and Utkin create architecture not to provide physical shelter or solve 'architectural problems'; rather, they engage the built environment, its history and its conventions as a way to reflect on the larger dimensions of the human condition."

"Island of Stability: or the Open-Sky Museum of Stone Sculpture in the Centre of the Town" depicts views of huge sculp-



BRIDGE TOWER: Elevation drawing by Brodsky and Utkin shows the timber scaffolding for the third tower in the current Tacoma (Wash.) 12th Street Bridge Project.

BOLD BRIDGE DESIGN MAY LIE LOW

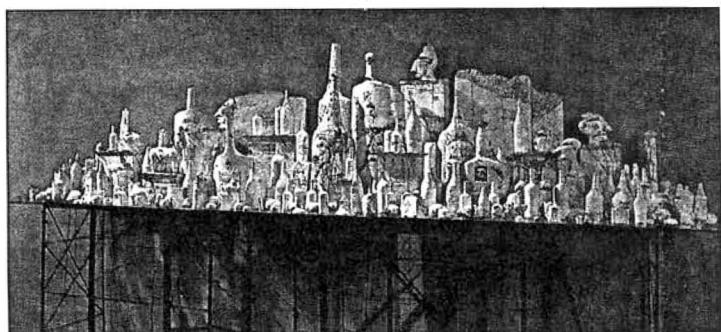
PORLAND, ORE.

After the city of Tacoma, Wash., asked Sasha Brodsky and Ilya Utkin to devise a plan to reconnect the city to its waterfront, the architects designed a heavy-timber pedestrian bridge that combines the characteristics of a water-front pier with the traditional railroad trestle.

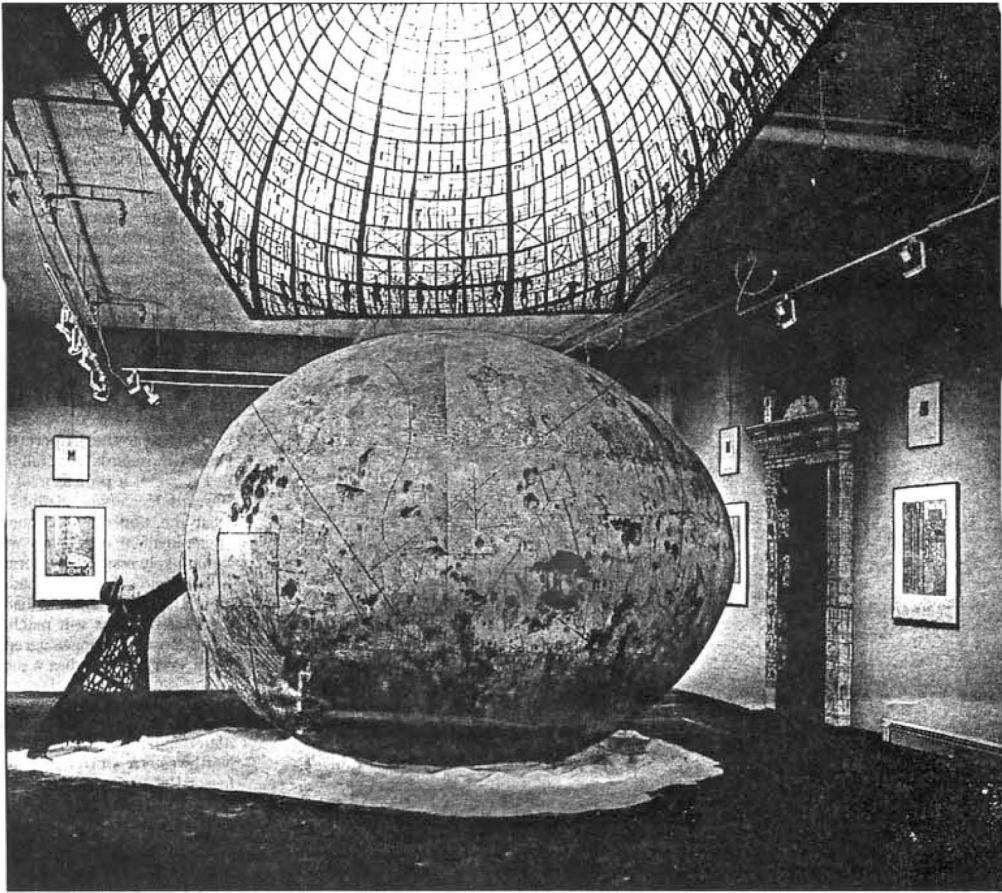
The pedestrian bridge they propose extends 320 feet from the base of 12th Street with a 30-foot-wide deck. The tree-lined stone deck would be supported by five piers, with the fifth tower standing about 70 feet above the shoreline. Pedestrians could walk down to the waterfront by way of switch-back ramps. Timber latticework on the towers would serve as decorative sculpture.

When building will commence – or whether the bridge will be built at all – remains to be seen. Engineering and cost estimates have been done, says Michael Sullivan, manager of the division of cultural resources for the city. But more public interest and money are needed.

- K.A.C.



'STILL LIFE' (1989): Like a miniature city, the plaster objects carve out a skyline atop an iron table.



'PORTRAIT OF AN UNKNOWN PERSON, OR PETER CARL FABERGÉ'S NIGHTMARE' (1990): Brodsky and Utkin's giant egg sculpture is painted plaster.

ture placed in the middle of a cluttered town. The accompanying text (in English) reads: "For those who are tired of plastic reality, for those who feel sick of foam rubber life, for those who believe in heavy things that are difficult to move...." Here, one sees how the idea of a gargantuan egg led to the three-dimensional installation.

Their other ceramic and plaster sculptures, such as "Door Way" and "Still Life," suggest ancient artifacts from classical ruins. This could be a result of their edu-

cation, which was steeped in architectural history. Gargoyles, heads, vessels, and columns with cracks and engravings all look like archaeological finds.

The team has even titled their Tacoma bridge project "Trestle: Ancient." The real importance of the Twelfth Street Bridge is that it represents the team's largest opportunity in "real" urban architecture.

City officials in Tacoma wanted to explore the possibility that a public-works project could include artists. They first took notice of Brodsky and Utkin during the 1990 Goodwill Games, when their works were featured in an exhibit at the Tacoma Art Museum.

Tacoma's challenge involves finding a way to connect the city to its waterfront; the two are separated by an 80-foot decline, a freeway, and railroad tracks.

"Along came Sasha and Ilya... It was an automatic and natural connection," says Michael Sullivan, manager of the division of cultural resources for the city.

After studying the history, geography, and industry of Tacoma, Brodsky and Utkin designed a bridge to be made out of heavy timber. (Local manufacturers suggest that special glue-laminated, treated

wood would make the bridge as durable as, but less expensive than, steel or concrete.) In their plan, a linear park bordered by trees leads down to the waterfront by a switchback-ramp system and elevators surrounded by timber latticework.

"It's practical but aesthetic – a wonderful idea," Mr. Sullivan says.

All this has caused people to wonder if Brodsky and Utkin have put away their purely-for-paper renderings. Among some in the arts community, there's a bittersweet sadness to see Brodsky and Utkin executing "real" architecture – almost as if their imaginative work is not happening anymore, Sullivan says.

But they're doing what they've wanted to be doing all along.

"They see progress. They see themselves making great strides forward," Sullivan says. "That's the real Grail that they're after: the possibility and the realization of what they're doing in three-dimensions and in full scale."

"Their resolve and relentlessness is very encouraging."

■ "Brodsky and Utkin: The Twelfth Street Pedestrian Bridge" will be at the Kathy Kaperick Gallery in Tacoma, Wash., Feb. 17 through Mar. 10.

Houlihan, Mike. "Drawing on Fantasy - Beyond the frame of architecture." *The Evening Post* (Monday, March 2, 1992) (Wellington): 11.

ON FANTASY



Building and exhibiting, Moscow artist-architects Ilya Utkin (front) and Alexander Brodsky.

Beyond the frame of architecture

By MIKE HOULAHAN

Wellingtonians will be coming face to face with the fanciful creations of Moscow artist/architects Alexander Brodsky and Ilya Utkin during the Festival of the Arts.

The pair are known internationally for their extraordinary plans for impossible cities, going beyond the boundaries of workable architecture.

Their sculpture *Palazzo de Nera* and more than 40 of their etchings will be on display at the Wellington City Art Gallery. The duo will also create a sculpture in the Civic Square with help from students at Victoria University's School of Architecture.

"This will also be a kind of architectural thing, a tower made out of wood," Brodsky says. "This is the first time we will be working with students. We are not teaching them, but for them it will be educational, hopefully. I hope it will be interesting for them."

First the pair have to complete work on *Palazzo Nero*, the installation in the City Art Gallery. A massive work, it occupies all of the downstairs gallery.

"Here the only material we have used is wood, but there is also some black oil," Brodsky says.

"We began constructing it a week and a half ago, and I'm sure we will continue working on it until the opening of the exhibition [today]."

Palazzo Nero follows on in a similar vein from installations Brodsky and Utkin have assembled in America.

"We've done installations in

"We start with a number of drawings and then turn them into the sculpture. We try to make a

kind of three dimensional drawing, a sculpture that looks like a drawing."

Alexander Brodsky

the US that were a little similar," Brodsky says.

"Not exactly like this one, but they also used black and white."

"We start with a number of drawings and then turn them into the sculpture. We try to make a kind of three dimensional drawing, a sculpture that looks like a drawing."

Palazzo Nero is a challenging work, but Brodsky believes it has universal appeal.

"I think that any person can understand it. Most of the etchings have explanations, and on the installation there will also be text."

"So if you read it you will definitely understand something. But anyone is free to understand it in any way they like."

The Artists: Brodsky and Utkin
Where: City Art Gallery
When: March 3 - May 3
What: *Palazzo Nero* installation, plus more than 40 large-scale etchings. A second sculpture to be created in Civic Square



BRODSKY & UTKIN
RONALD FELDMAN FINE
ARTS

Soviet architects Alexander Brodsky and Ilya Utin escape the often suffocating constraints of conventional practice by concentrating on speculative drawings and the fabrication of artifacts. Their fantastic visions first became familiar to the international architectural community through their proposals for the annual Central Glass Competitions in Tokyo. Obsessive, psychological drawings and bizarre structures provided a vivid contrast to the surprisingly sober speculations of other "paper architects" responding to similar frustrations with the limitations of building.

Brodsky and Utin pack their architectural propositions with multiple images, narratives, studies, and assorted creative musings, and it is this density that supplies their work with its particular urgency. For this exhibition, the architects filled the gallery to near overflowing. An enormous plaster arrow suspended in the vestibule supplied the first hint of the challenging abundance within. Encrusted with scratches and marks, it pointed to the focus of the south gallery—a bowler-capped figure straining to push a large, irregular, 12-foot sphere resting on an island of white sand. Like the

arrow, the egg's surface was carved with hieroglyphics. This existential vignette was entitled *Portrait of an Unknown Person or Peter Carl Fabergé's Nightmare*, 1990.

The north gallery was devoted to a grid-like installation entitled *Forum de Mille Veritatis* (Forum of a thousand truths, 1990), in which 16 floor-to-ceiling cardboard columns covered with small scraps of sketches and assorted notations rose from a black Plexiglas surface suggesting a nocturnal sea. A solitary gondolier holding a small beacon attempted to navigate this bewildering situation.

Though these enormous, pivotal installations provided the exhibition's focus, there was a strong pull to gallery walls filled with Brodsky & Utin's funny and disturbing etchings. Visions of the architectural anomalies of the modern city, each drawing exposed a new dimension of alienation. *Columbarium Habitabile*, 1989–90, depicts the corner of a courtyard. The surrounding elevations consist of a grid of open volumes, each containing an individual house. A nostalgic collection of small-town specimens, the facades are assembled in a vast urban system. A large sphere suspended above the courtyard menaces the tiny figures who shuffle through the cavernous atrium. An etching entitled *Stageless Theater*, 1986–90, consists of a flatbed truck with walls and a ceiling attached to create the interior of an ornate theater. An audience gathered in tiers of seats faces the open back of the truck which slowly creeps through the city. The unscripted performance is the ordinary spectacle of life encountered along a particular route.

Brodsky and Utin possess a spectacular vision of the strange confusions of contemporary life. Their view is both romantic and technically restrained, simultaneously funny

and fatalistic. The work registers and excavates the pressures of a place and time, and of the interior conditions of embedded lives in exile. There is a sense of underground refuge in these works, yet they are drawings of worldly resistance, not indulgent retreat.

—PCP

Freudenheim, Susan. "Paper dreamers." *The Tribune* (San Diego), November 3, 1989, pp. C1, C8.

Paper dreamers

Architect-artists build a fictional empire

By Susan Freudenheim

Tribune Art Critic

AS SOON AS Moscow architects Alexander Brodsky and Ilya Utkin arrived in San Diego a couple of weeks ago, they bought running shoes, visited the ocean and said they wanted to go to the zoo.

Not surprising from Soviets visiting this city for the first time.

But in many more subtle and important ways, the two are anything but predictable — at least from a Western point of view. In town preparing for shows at San Diego State University and the La Jolla Museum of Contemporary Art, they are the only official avant-garde representatives to the Soviet arts festival.

Brodsky and Utkin have become well-known as protagonists in a Moscow movement known as

Paper Architecture, formed by a changing group of 20 to 30 participants. The name comes from the fact that most of the group's work remains on paper, and many of the designs initially were made for international competitions in Japan and Europe.

The two artists have won many of these competitions, including some in the United States.

Still, it's clear that this is a huge opportunity for them. They have rarely exhibited. In fact, these shows are their first solo shows.

Most artists have many such shows before becoming as respected as these two. But, as Brodsky said cryptically, "Everything happens from the other end."

For their show at SDSU's art gallery — the larger of the two — they are importing a 5-foot-long plaster sculptural egg they made in Moscow; its relation, if any, to the Fabergé eggs will only be

Soviet artists and architects Alexander Brodsky, seated, and Ilya Utkin with one of their sculptures at the SDSU art gallery

revealed when the show opens on Oct. 28. Additional sculptures made during a recent trip to Holland also will be shown, as well as early and recent etchings at both venues (the La Jolla museum's show opens Sunday).

Right off, both artists let you know that though they're happy to be here, happy to be a part of the festival, they're a little baffled by the wealth of opportunity and materials they find in the United States.

A trip to the store, for example, could take hours, Brodsky complained laughingly: "In Moscow, when we want etching paper, there is only one type. When we get it, we're happy. Here, there are hundreds of kinds, so you spend all your time making choices. And finally, you don't buy anything."

Brodsky should know. The SDSU studio where they are working is right next to the art-supply store.

In manner and stature, they blend in with the students on the SDSU campus. They look young —

they're both 34 — and they can be quite playful and joking, although talk of art is mostly serious. By default, Brodsky has become the spokesman since Utkin speaks little English.

Soft-spoken and friendly, Brodsky is also very deliberate about making his points. It quickly becomes clear that the pair is ambitious, but despite the opportunities in the West, they make clear that they have no desire to leave Moscow. It's home. Brodsky even calls the notion of expatriation "sad."

He explains that in the Soviet Union their life has changed radically under Gorbachev. But still, the pair is not political in art.

Before *glasnost*, he said "we never really were underground. We took part in some shows, we didn't want to be underground and we didn't want to be official. We just tried to do what we like. Sometimes it was hard, but we always got what we needed."



continued From C-1

Now, he said, travel is much easier. They have worked in Holland on a residency, making sculptures for a show there. And they have been to New York once. But this trip is their first to the West Coast.

They collaborate on all of their work, which includes fantastical architectural designs and sculptures. They have no apparent need for the go gratification of individuality. No aspect of their work is identifiably made by just one of them. Their kind of partnership is somewhat common among Eastern Bloc artists but is virtually unheard of here.

They are well-known in Moscow but have rarely exhibited there; just a few group shows. And in 17 years of working together they've realized only two small architectural projects.

Brodsky explained that Moscow's art scene is active, though not always in public ways. Artists regularly show their work to each other, they spread news and information quickly. They collaborate on projects, share publications and videos from the West. And they enter competitions worldwide — through the mail.

Graduates of the Moscow Architectural Institute, Brodsky and Utkin continue to see themselves as architects, but these days much of what they make could more accurately be called fine art. Moscow's architectural system is run mostly by engineers, at least for now, so the two are not likely to realize their highly eccentric designs. But they have evolved an architectural style that mostly could not be built.

For the most part, theirs is a beautifully impractical kind of design: a bridge that looks like a domed bird cage reminiscent of an ancient Russian church; a futuristic house with drawbridge lifts for the cars so that you can enter the garage — and the automobile — from the second story; a glass tower dedicated to honoring the Little Man.

These and other inventions — which so far have only been rendered in elaborate etchings — are some-

times utopian, sometimes satirical, always unusual.

The artists' etchings and three-dimensional plaster sculptures make you feel that the adversity of Moscow's situation isn't so bad after all. Rather than allow their creativity to be crippled by the lack of opportunity, these artists turned to unfettered flights of fancy.

And they have grown in ways that might be unimaginable to more fortunate architects. Without the practical limitations of engineering and construction, Brodsky and Utkin remain free to dream.

"Part of the reason we never built anything is because we didn't want to compromise," Brodsky said. "It is more important for us to do what we want than to build something."

Brodsky is quick to dispel stereotypes that artists in Moscow are hidden away and unhappy. He said that despite the hardships, life in Moscow is satisfying. The pair has a good studio and they support themselves with their work, primarily through hono-

rariums earned in design competitions.

Things are on the upswing for them, too. Next spring they'll have a show in New York, at SoHo's Ronald Feldman Gallery.

Not bad for their second solo show ever.

Works by Alexander Brodsky and Ilya Utkin will be on view at San Diego State University Art Gallery from Oct. 28 to Dec. 6. Gallery hours are noon to 4 p.m. Monday, Thursday and Saturday and 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Tuesday and Wednesday. Admission is free, and parking permits are available in the gallery.

"Etchings by Alexander Brodsky and Ilya Utkin" will be on view Oct. 22-Dec. 10 at the La Jolla Museum of Contemporary Art, 700 Prospect St. Hours are 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesday through Sunday, Wednesdays until 9 p.m.

Imaginary Cityscapes

Brodsky and Utkin
at San Diego State

BY JUDITH CHRISTENSEN

The paintings of Edward Hopper evoke a strong sense of the American city, small town and countryside of the era in which they were produced. Other painters, for example John Nava or David Ligare, utilize indicators from the classical era—columns, mythological references and so on—in a contemporary format. Alexander Brodsky and Ilya Utkin produce work that is tied to the past in terms of presentation, rooted in present-day issues and futuristic in vision.

Many of their etchings, at the La Jolla Museum of Contemporary Art and the San Diego State University Art Gallery, were created in response to competitions sponsored by Japanese architectural publications. Although architects by training, they proposed solutions that are conceptual. The designs

are not intended to be built; rather, they respond to issues.

In this respect their work is similar to that of Helen and Newton Harrison. Both teams investigate the habitability of our environment. And both teams combine visual imagery and text. Whereas the Harrisons' work is, for the most part, site-specific, Brodsky's and Utkin's is generalized. In fact, since the text is in English and they address problems existent in any urban center, I wasn't sure by just viewing the work whether they still lived in Moscow or had emigrated to New York. (The former is the case.)

Stageless Theater or Wandering Spectators' Hall is a variation on Shakespeare's "All the world's a stage..." The audience-platform moves through the city streets on a large, six-axle truck. "For those who know how to look, the life of the city is unpre-

dictable, a constantly changing, mysterious spectacle," explains the accompanying text. In *Columbarium Habitabile* a huge concrete structure divided into cubicles is constructed in the center of a large, modern city. This gives the inhabitants of the little, old houses, which would otherwise be demolished as they are not part of the city's general plan, a place to which they can move their home intact.

Although no city may ever fabricate the *Columbarium Habitabile* to preserve its old structures, parts of *Island of Stability* became a three-dimensional installation at the SDSU Art Gallery venue. A giant, plaster egg, almost touching the gallery's high ceiling, occupies the center of the floor. Behind it, on a shelf that runs the length of the rear wall, is a tableau, *After a Big Celebration*, made up of hundreds of cracked, plaster objects: bottles, monuments, heads, animals, stone-like shapes, and fragments of tablets. The strength of this piece stems not from its individual parts, as evidenced by four separate plaster figures, each on its own sculpture stand. Isolated like this, the pieces lack meaning. The work's impact derives from the context of the whole which, viewed from a distance, resembles a city skyline, one which overindulged the night before.

The two large-scale installations indicate that Brodsky and Utkin's three-dimensional work is equal to its two-dimensional precursors with which it shares many qualities. The allusions to the past include content as well as presentation. The etching paper is made to look old. The surface of the egg is cracked, scratched, marked, then rubbed with oil, paint and beeswax so it appears like an archeological remnant. Some of the objects in the tableau are unrecognizable fragments, like ceramic shards found on an archeological dig. Mythological references abound. The plaster figure that appears to be pushing the giant egg becomes an updated Myth of Sisyphus. Laocoön and his sons coiled in serpents appear in *A Contemporary Architectural Art Museum* and Icarus flies through the atrium of *Villa Claustrophobia*. Brodsky and Utkin utilize columns, domes and other classical architectural elements again and again.

There is a sense of mapping in the cityscapes of the etchings that also extends to the three-dimensional work. The vertical buildings, tightly packed and almost growing out of one another as in *Wandering Turtle in a Maze of a Big City*, can also be read as a street map. The rows of

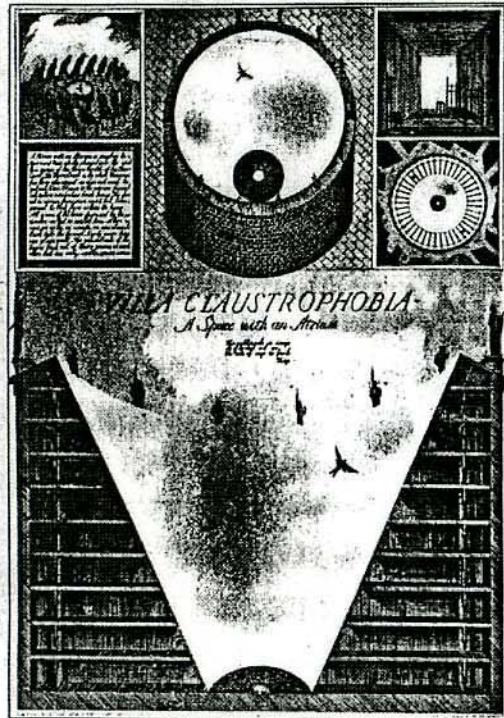
windows become footprints of buildings that line the streets as well as cars, outdoor cafe tables and flower boxes. Likewise, some of the blotches on the surface of the egg become countries, even continents and seas.

Brodsky and Utkin may postulate imaginary constructs, yet their ideas carry import for practical architecture. In *Villa Claustrophobia*, living quarters are stacked in tight proximity.

What exempts this from being just another high-rise apartment building is a magical atrium, glazed with one-way mir-

ror-glass that reflects the sky. Occupants look out onto it, but rather than see neighbors, they "see only endlessness." The artists' metaphorical allusions recognize human beings' need for light, a sense of space, mobility, privacy and so on, needs that modern architecture often ignores. And, say Brodsky and Utkin, the solutions are not unattainable; they may be hiding right behind us, encased within our own past. ■

Alexander Brodsky and Ilya Utkin, through December 6 at San Diego State University Art Gallery, San Diego.



Brodsky and Utkin, *Villa Claustrophobia*, 1985, etching, 14" x 11", at San Diego

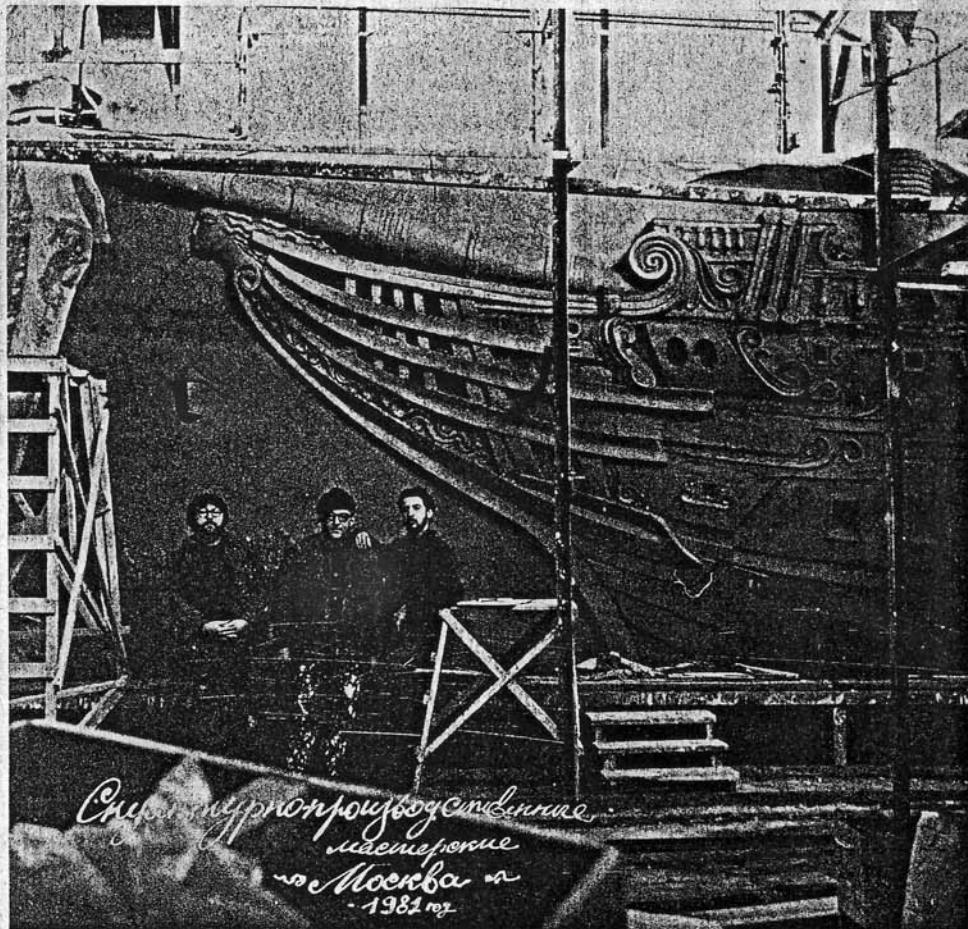
Benson, Michael R. "Paper Classics." *Interview XVIII*, no. 12 (December 1988): 168-71.

paper classics

conceptual architects

sasha brodsky and
ilya utkin draw a fine
line on the heart
of moscow.

RIGHT: ARCHITECTS
ILYA UTKIN AND
SASHA BRODSKY
FLANK BRODSKY'S
FATHER, SAVVA, IN
FRONT OF A RELIEF
OF THEIR DESIGN
FOR THE EXTERIOR
OF MOSCOW'S
GREEN MUSEUM.
BELOW: A DETAIL
FROM UTKIN AND
BRODSKY'S ATRIUM,
MOSCOW'S TRENDY
EATERY.



by michael r. benson

photographs by IGOR PALMIN

Sasha Brodsky and Ilya Utkin don't live in Moscow so much as they live in a version of it they've re-created for themselves. Utkin—last seen hammering and sawing away at his apartment, squinting down at a set of blueprints frighteningly similar to the etchings he makes with Brodsky—seems to be conducting his own personal *perestroika* campaign. Down the booming ring road and to the left—past the Foreign Ministry building, a giant Stalinist spire perpetually orbited by ominous black crows—Brodsky can be found in a studio that looks like an archeological dig.

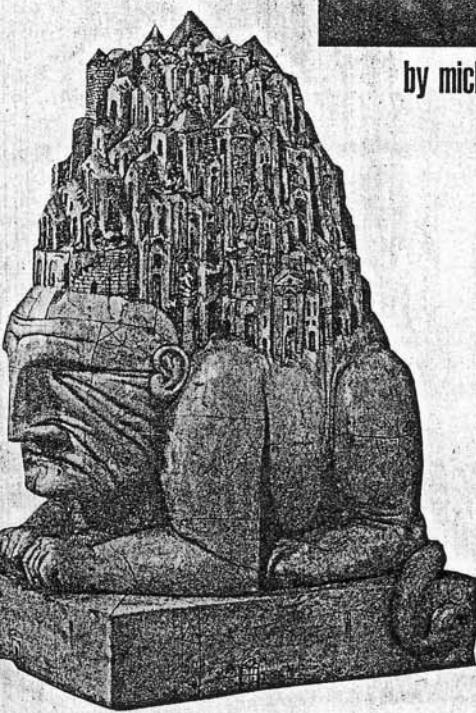
Although their work is almost impossible to classify, Brodsky and Utkin are founding members of a loose fraternity of young Russian conceptualists sometimes called the "paper architects." The movement started in the mid-'70s, during what are now being called the "years of stagnation"—the Brezhnev era, when innovation was discouraged, ennui covered the country like a wet blanket, and vodka was cheap and plentiful.

Anyone who has seen the featureless march of giant apartment blocks in

Moscow and other Soviet cities will understand pretty quickly where paper architecture came from. "It became a force against the grayness of the environment and combated it," writes Yuri Abakumov, a member of the group, in the catalogue for a Paris exhibition of their work last spring. "It was a research of some dissidence in order to find an architecture free from all that the collectivists had imposed on it."

Despite its "dissidence," paper architecture found some backers in the late '70s, and under the official sponsorship of the Soviet Union of Architects, Brodsky and Utkin's work began to attract attention in the West. The team won the first of many foreign awards at a design competition in Paris in 1979. Since then they have become famous in Tokyo, where the Tokyo Glass Company holds a yearly architectural competition with a theme—a space with an atrium, a glass palace, a "forum of a thousand verities." Sasha and Ilya generally evaluate the theme and flip it on its head, arriving at solutions that might make even Barcelona's Surrealist architect Antonio Gaudi sit up in his grave and whistle.

Their string of awards in Tokyo only



confirmed what many had already figured out: that the purely fantastical nature of their designs wasn't just a reaction to the rutted concrete of Soviet urban reality—it was something new, a kind of nonconformist commentary on contemporary postmodern Western architecture. "Look, the 'years of stagnation' were not just in Soviet life, but in all architectural life in the whole world as well," argues a Russian artist and friend of Brodsky's. "Brodsky and Utkin created a kind of alternative to the postmodernist way of thinking. In that sense, yes, they are dissidents. It's also very romantic architecture. I don't think you can say they officially represent romanticism—they don't—but there are a lot of very romantic things in their architecture: you know, mood, color, the beautiful dark sepia of their etchings."

"The best thing I can say about it is they understand all of the history of architecture," says Ronald Feldman of SoHo's Ronald Feldman Gallery. "But, coming from the Soviet Union, they are not stuck in what we call postmodernism or modernism. They just ignored all these things and went about doing their business—which looks somewhat classical, but when you examine it you realize that it's totally reinvigorated with contemporary ideas. And it's hysterical. They don't just make brief, silly references to art history to create something that's postmodern; they're making real references and having fun with the real ideas."

Feldman—whose gallery has promoted the work of the Russians lately, hosting a show by Moscow's "unofficial" artist Ilya Kabakov early this year—flew to France in June to meet Brodsky and Utkin, who were then in Paris for the paper architecture exhibition. His proposal for a New York show of their work, currently slated to open next spring, was accepted. (Brodsky and Utkin, who have never been to the United States, first showed several pieces of their work in New York last spring at The Clocktower.) Asked if there will be a specific theme to the show, Feldman says, "They're taking it very seriously and it's going to be very important, but I cannot describe it to you."

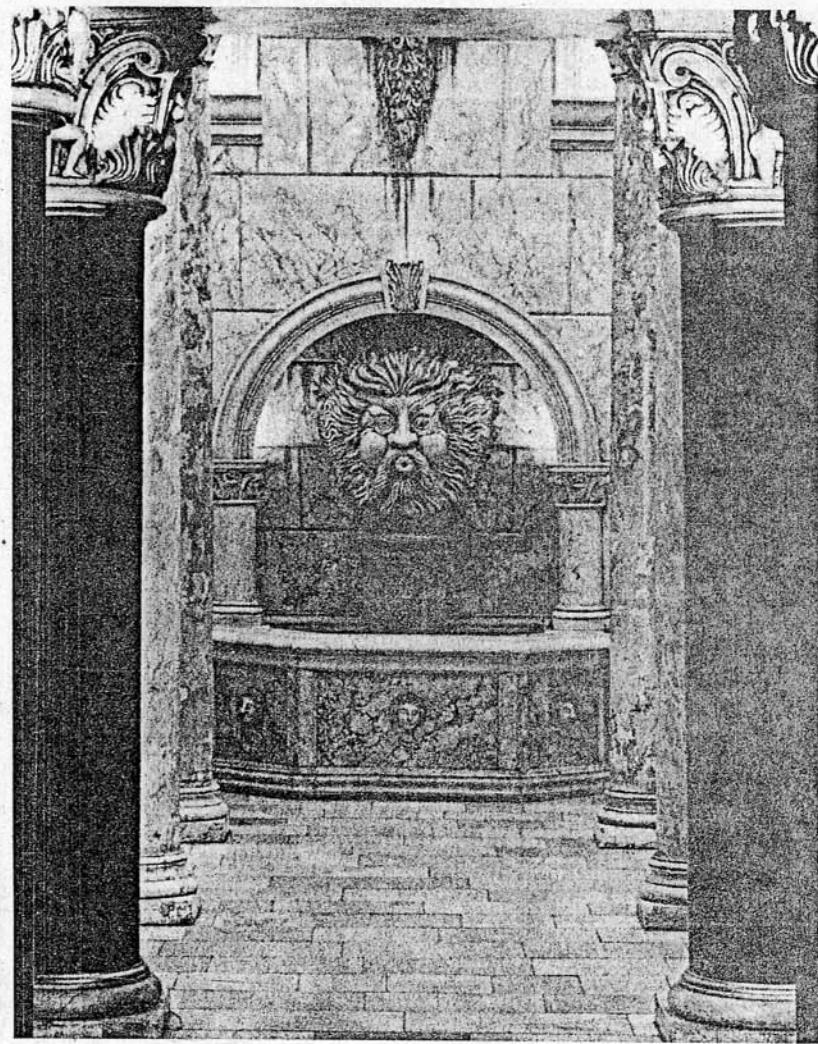
The team met in 1972, when they were both students at Moscow's prestigious Institute of Architecture. Their habit of working together became so ingrained that when they graduated six years later, they were issued a single diploma with both their names on it. The buildings on Zhdanov Street where they studied had once been Moscow's main arts school, Vkhutemas (sometimes called the Russian Bauhaus), a central stage for the Constructivist movement in the '20s and a focal point for artistic and architectural innovation. When Joseph Stalin closed down Constructivism at the end of the decade, he renamed the place, and after the war he used it to turn out designers for his series of vast neoclassical skyscrapers. Moscow's skyline changed dramatically, and one of the most fertile periods of Russian art and architecture was buried in rubble.

Ironically enough, Brodsky and Utkin are less interested in Constructivism than in the castles Stalin built. Stalinist architecture has been called "an epic of facades covering over sad reality, as one covers over a deceitful discourse," but it at least put various interesting architectural elements back into the Soviet vocabulary. "It was the age of the great builders," says Brodsky. "After it, nobody could do such buildings. Nobody could project them and nobody could build them. Nobody could make a column with a capital, you know?"

(continued on page 196)



THE POSTMODERN
DINING HALL OF
THE ATRIUM IS
PAINTED, ABOVE AND
BELOW, IN FAUX
MARBLE.



ARCHITECTS

(continued from page 169)

Nobody could make some good sculpture in architecture. And the Metro—we are very influenced by the Metro."

After Stalin came Khrushchev and Brezhnev, the hive-builders. It was the third chapter of postrevolutionary architecture; anything other than utilitarian mass production was considered frivolous, if not downright anti-Soviet. It was an ideology springing from both a blinkered interpretation of Marxist theory and the postwar housing crunch, which had most of the Soviet population crammed uncomfortably into communal apartments. After a seemingly endless succession of five-year plans, Moscow and other Soviet cities began to resemble vast low-income housing projects. In effect, that's exactly what they were.

Brodsky and Utkin, though, live in a different Moscow—a city identifiable in the cartoon Brodsky includes at the end of his letter. It is a drawing of himself in his studio, with a view toward the Kremlin. Crowning the horizon is the spire and red star of the Hotel Ukraine—one of Stalin's buildings, encrusted with heroic statues, turrets, and battlements. A small plane flies on a collision course with the hotel. Perched on a rooftop above, a large trop-

Like their paper architecture, The Atrium quotes slyly from various periods of art history. Behind the fountain, a large sculpture of a lion doesn't roar; it laughs. Across a crackling phone connection, Brodsky laughs also. "You know Leninsky Prospect—it's a huge, very strange street. From the outside, The Atrium looks like a simple dwelling house of the '60s. But when you go in, you see something rather strange—not Leninsky Prospect. Some piece of, I don't know, Italy or maybe some strange country."

Their etchings also come from a "strange country." They read like encoded parables from some undogmatic zone of the imagination where different architectural elements fuse, producing a hybrid readable as metaphor, warning, or hieroglyphic message. Aztec figures hide in their "Glass Tower"—a detail observable only from above, like the strange animals picked out by satellite photos of the South American countryside. In *Forum of a Thousand Truths*, an immense forest of columns is plastered with hundreds of competing messages. Sitting at a table a healthy distance away, three people talk together. In a block of text below is the key line: "A word in friendly conversation gives more than all the computers in the world."

Threading through twenty years of ac-

ical bird peers at the upcoming disaster. Brodsky himself looks exactly as I remember him—scribbling away feverishly under an electric shock of hair, a bottle of low-grade vodka at his side (also good for cleaning paintbrushes and diesel engines). A radiator behind him steams. Gray clouds hang low in the sky. This is no city of Soviet tenements. It's the Russia of Gogol, where a loaf of good black bread might contain a human nose.

Like Gaudí in Barcelona, Brodsky and Utkin are starting to lift their ideas off paper and turn them into verifiable three-dimensional reality. This spring they designed and built The Atrium, a cooperative restaurant at 44 Leninsky Prospect in Moscow. "We worked like horses for four, five months, twelve hours every day without rest, and almost got crazy," Brodsky writes. "But at the same time we got great pleasure out of this work and as a result made not a bad thing, I think. The place immediately became famous in Moscow. Many American people were there, Canadian TV made some film there, and so on. But the main thing is that at last we have a place in our own city where they treat us soft (besides our flats, of course), where they simply let us get in with our friends without a scandal—it's a pity only that they don't feed us free of charge (and their prices are rather high)."

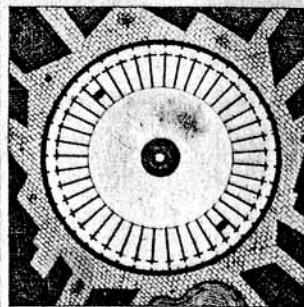
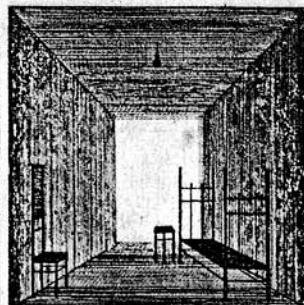
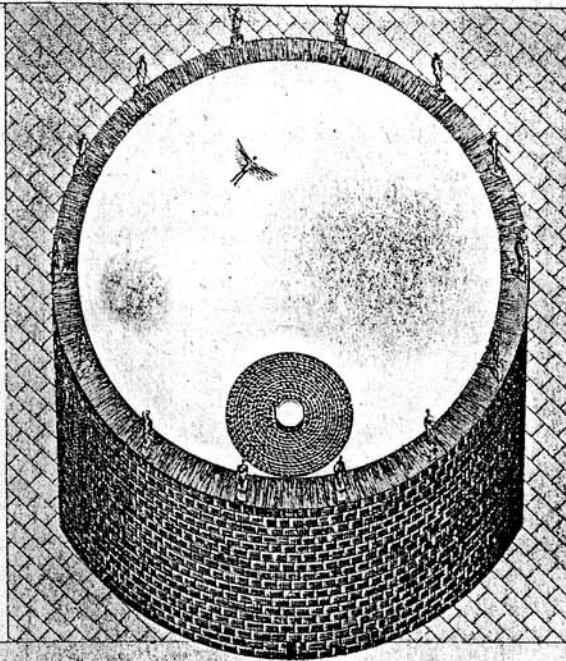
cumulated junk in Brodsky's studio, I come across archeological layers: detailed architectural drawings of a Roman stadium, a print of an immense city spanning a river, congratulatory letters from Japan, a bootleg videocassette of Led Zeppelin's *The Song Remains the Same*. Hanging from the ceiling is Venice, made of paper; hanging from the wall is a giant painting of Don Quixote, squinting through contracted pupils at the Castilian sun, armored fist clenched on jousting spear—this done by Sasha's late father, who was awarded membership in Goya's own San Fernando Academy of Fine Arts in Madrid for his book illustrations of the don. Sasha's studio, inherited from his father, has the same feeling as his work does: a chaotic zone where elements recombine—a kind of infinite architectural resource.

"Paper architecture was born as a condemnation of urban chaos," writes the curator of the Paris exhibit, Hélène Larroche, who goes on to compare the genre with "philosophical discourse." Armed with this information, I call Sasha Brodsky in Moscow and ask him about the devious "quotes" he and Ilya Utkin built into The Atrium. What's the philosophy behind it? "We wanted to make a good space for drinking. Only this." Laughter from the lion's mouth came back across the satellite bounce. □



A House with an Atrium is similar to a buried man wholly plunged into the endless space of his three worlds--of his Inner Court. The Inner Court is the whole Universe for those who cannot or do not want to get out. Our Atrium is the narrow funnel set in to a umbilical brick-house. The funnel is mirror from inner court but extends outward to look down within the house. All rooms of the house disposed by the cylinder--called no matter how--by rooms, or cells, or wards, or apartments look into the funnel. Each room has one glass wall. The inhabitants of the house look out of their rooms at each other but see only endlessness--<--

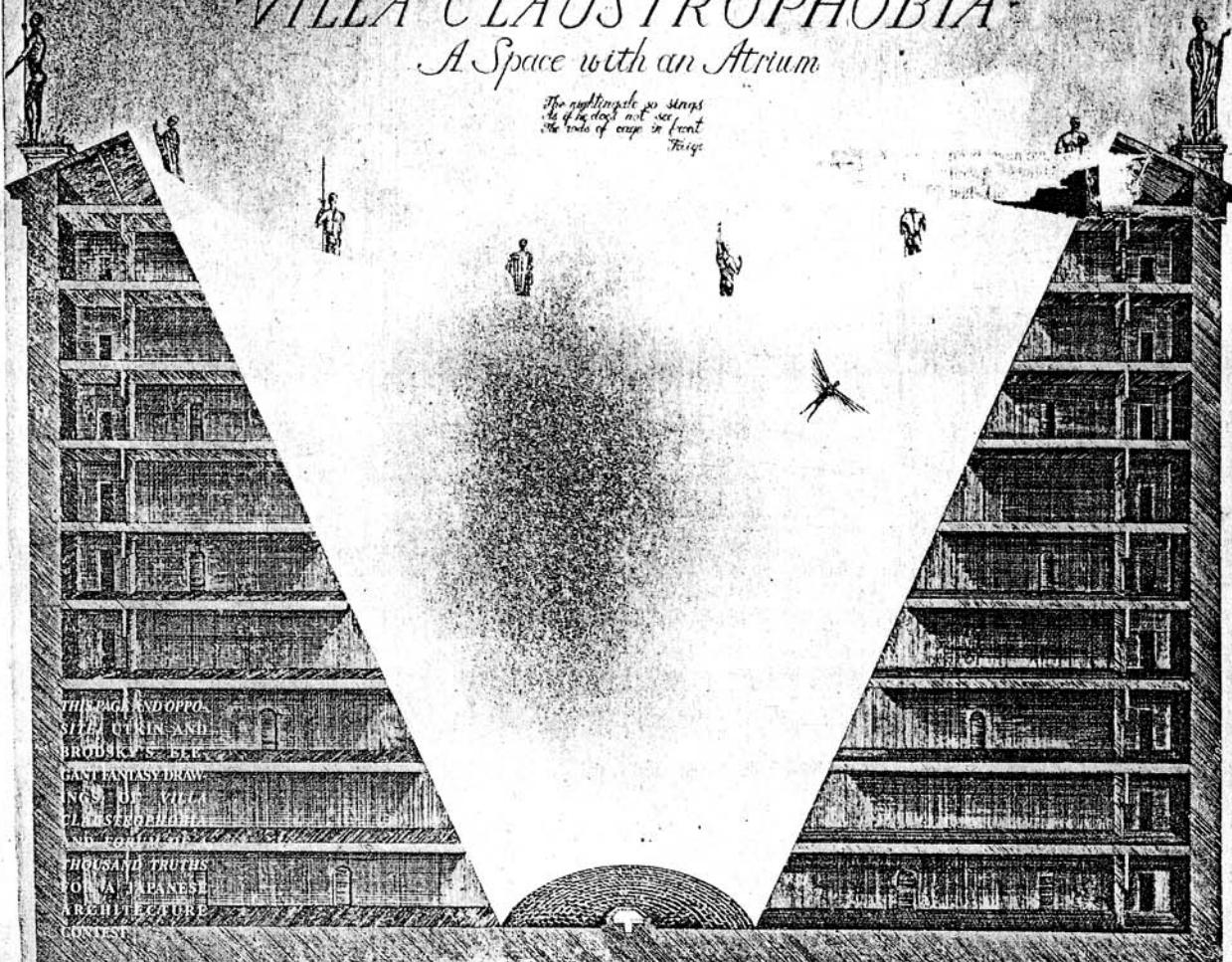
MCMLXXXV



VILLA CLAUSTROPHOBIA-

A Space with an Atrium

The nightingale so sings
as if he does not see
the robe of cage in front
Tolstoi

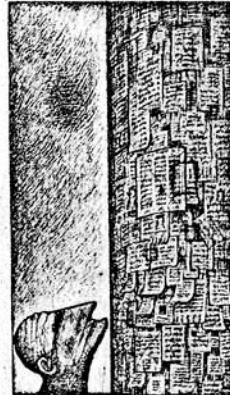
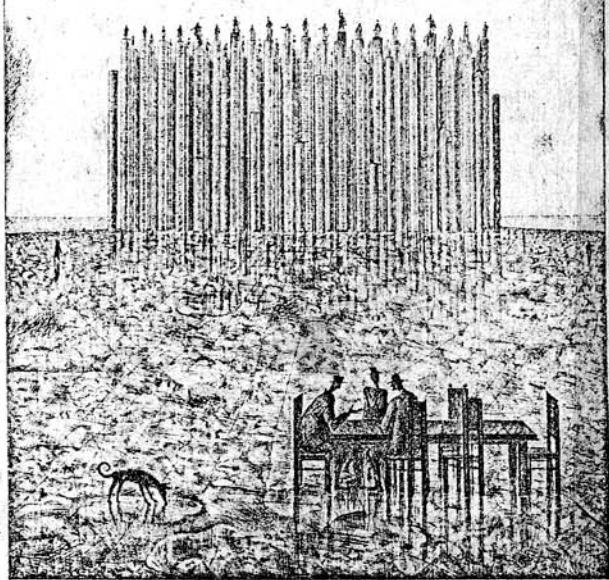


THE PAGE AND OPOPO,
SITEM UTRIN AND
BRODSKY S. ELL.

GANT FANTASY DRAW-
INGS OF VILLA
CLAUSTROPHOBIA
AND FORM M-30

THOUSAND TRUTHS
TO A LITTLE
ARCHITECTURE
BY GANT

FORVM DE MILLE VERITATIS.



Forum of Thousand Truths
The Intelligent Market
Impossible to embrace the immensity. We spend several years
reducing it in a maze in German
searching of hypotheses and
finally understand that we have
learned nothing, nothing that
we really needed. The informa-
tion that can be bought for
money is not worth paying. We
can't embrace it at one glance.
We can't select it with a click
because it comes from people
even being perceived by modest
computer. But none of computers
would never tell us the very ex-
istence of the majority. The Best Info
mutation must be bought. It's
accessible to those who can ne-
gotiate, think. It is despera-
d everywhere. In each spot, car-
io, stone, pool. A word in front
by conversation gives more than
all computers in the world. Se-
tting through the forest, walking
in the field - maybe a visitor of
the Forum will find at last his
own truth - one from thousands.

