

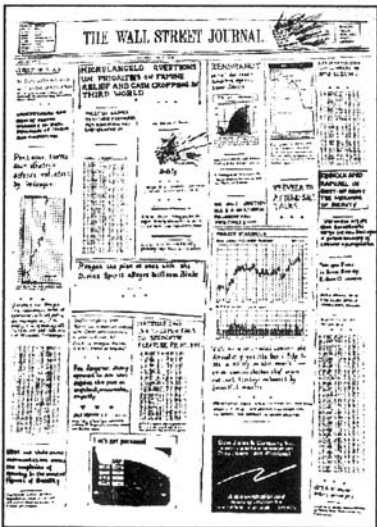
Bray, Matthew. "Strokes from a polemical paintbrush." *European*, July 14, 1990.

## EUROPEAN ARTS EVENTS

NOT TO BE MISSED THIS WEEK...

# Strokes from a polemical paintbrush

*Matthew Bray views CONRAD ATKINSON's work, now on show in Moscow*



Silk screen: Wall Street Journal 1985

**T**HE WORK of Conrad Atkinson is being shown in Moscow for the first time. The exhibition of his paintings and prints coincides with the Communist Party Congress (CPC). This English artist has been brought to the attention of Muscovites courtesy of the writer and critic Joseph Bakstein, who, after seeing Atkinson's work in New York, invited him to comment on and analyse in a partly fictional, partly humorous way, the event of the CPC.

Atkinson made news in 1972 by documenting a strike in a thermometer factory in his home town of Cleator in Cumbria, northern England. The exhibition, at the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London, had many innocuous composites – salary

slips, newspaper reports, photographs and letters – but was subject to vicious criticism by a London art critic who later became a convert to Atkinson's viewpoint.

Atkinson went on to mount one-man shows on potent political issues, such as the hazards facing iron-ore miners and the conflict in Northern Ireland. When the Washington Hirshhorn Museum asked for some extra material on Northern Ireland to stage a larger exhibition than the one that had appeared in Paris, the British Council announced that it could not help.

The London Underground system was subjected to Atkinson's approach in 1985 when he produced two posters that mimicked advertisements for *The Wall Street Journal* and the British paper *The Financial Times*,

but using his own words. Atkinson says of his Moscow exhibition: "It will be mock-ups of mostly European newspapers with most of the text obliterated by paint and ink. The headlines will be in gold type and pastel and the effect is to produce a kind of Russian icon."

Atkinson hopes to show the Russians that the West, too, has problems to overcome. He says: "I have met many people from Russia and east central Europe who are just beginning to realise that there are other kinds of democracy. But I want to warn them that we too have many difficulties to sort out."

*Conrad Atkinson's works are on show at the Autozavodskaya exhibition hall, Moscow, until July 22*