

Alexander Brodsky

RONALD FELDMAN

During the Soviet regime, Moscow students used to joke that someday in the distant future their descendants would be attending lectures devoted to the archeology of the Soviet Union.

Then the Soviet Union became history. Now those very intellectuals who mocked the rotten regime have been discovering that that "evil empire" can provoke some unexpectedly nostalgic feelings. Alexander Brodsky's show "Grey Matter" brilliantly triggered and captured those complex emotions.

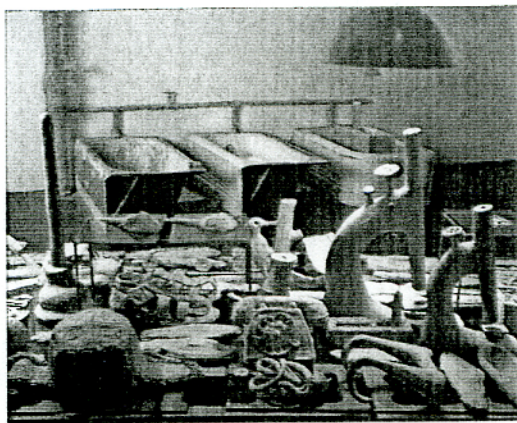
The abundance of objects reproduced here in gray clay highlighted the material underpinnings of the Soviet Union, a lost world that Brodsky reconstructed with the precision of an archeologist. One of the most impressive displays in the main gallery was a long tableful of clay sculptures in the shape of everyday objects—a kind of Soviet Pompeii consisting of irons, radios, bras, opened sardine cans, old skates, busts of Lenin, boots, and lots and lots of buttons. Today, in every post-Soviet city, you can see all this junk laid out on blankets and atop portable tables being sold by pensioners who couldn't survive the brave new world of the free market.

The only signs of new times among these objects were different kinds of firearms—the trademark of the new capitalism, according to comrade criminals. Elsewhere there were several broken and rusty bathtubs containing models of dilapidated industrial buildings—crosses between the Chernobyl nuclear plant and Gulag facilities—and more junk, including nails, splints, and buttons.

A central element in the show was a gigantic cornucopia—a traditional feature of Stalinist architecture and a symbol of the fertile Soviet soil. Not far away was a bed with three figures under a blanket—a father, a mother, and a child—all turned to stone by the lava of the Vesuvius of perestroika. Close to the bed was a statue of a dog looking at a TV set running black-and-white footage of rainy Moscow streets.

Brodsky created for this show a museum of unnecessary things in which everything was uniformly gray. And while it was able to evoke the tone of Soviet life, on the one hand, it also conjured up the sense of volcanic dust destroying a city after an unexpected eruption.

—Konstantin Akinsha



Alexander Brodsky,
Grey Matter, 1999,
unfired clay,
installation view.
Ronald Feldman.

Akinsha, Konstantin.
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