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### Alexander Brodsky at Ronald Feldman

Alexander Brodsky's exhibition, "Grey Matter," consisted of nine works, large and small, simple and elaborate. All were some sort of gray: an enormous etching of a vast landscape of rubble; a cold metal bed with the shapes of two adults and a child cupped together under a coverlet of dingy, dirty-white clay squares; a monumental crackled vase that looks like dull stone or concrete on a high pedestal faced with crusty cement board.

The most dazzling work in the show, however, was the first one visitors saw. Slicing diagonally across the main gallery was *Grey Matter (table)*, a concrete-block support about 3 feet tall topped with sheets of glass that were crammed with figurines and life-size renderings of everyday objects. All were made of unfired clay. This work clearly expressed the punning title of the show, gray matter describing the physical stuff of the exhibition and also making a

reference to the mind. Memory played a part here, since many objects were old-fashioned and many were children's.

It was impossible to look at these elementary objects without shaping their names, much as the subject of Beckett's *Krapp's Last Tape* draws out the contours of the word "spool": stocking cap, cooking pot, scissors, door handle, barbells, spectacles, birdhouse, buttons, soap dish, toilet seat, handbag, sneakers, slingshot, shuttlecock, shaving brush. This was an accumulation of ghosts that in life would have been variously colored and tactile. Some things, notably the buttons, looked Gustonesque—clumsy, amusing, pathetic.

Equally evocative was a work consisting of three white-enamel bathtubs absurdly linked with the same unfired clay to plumbing pipes passing (ordinarily unnoticed) through the gallery space. All three tubs were occupied by model structures: a military village or socialist housing project, a square building with a smokestack, a slit-windowed block that looks like an ancient prison. But scrawled on the walls of one tub are the outlines of a naked man and woman who recline at opposite ends. Strategically positioned at his crotch is a tower that is part of the housing project; her legs splay above the tub's drain. The phallic joke doubles, for the tower is also a light fixture (with a conical shade), the cord for which runs to her drain. No matter how grim the context, it's still possible to laugh.

These and other works are mournfully funny, nostalgically sad, with a sense of desolation like many of Ilya Kabakov's installations. Brodsky is known for his collaborations with Ilya Utkin but



Alexander Brodsky: Installation view of "Grey Matter," 1999; at Ronald Feldman.

has been making works and projects on his own for several years, showing some at Feldman. His extra-gallery work includes a version of Venice's canals created on an abandoned New York City subway track in 1996, sponsored by the Public Art Fund.

—Janet Koplos