

Venetian Fantasy Still Afloat in a Usually Waterless Canal

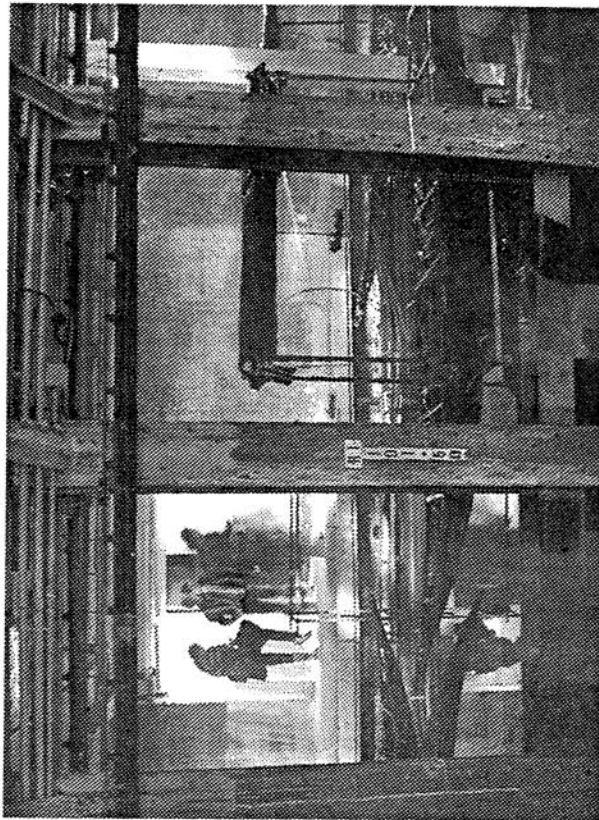
For some time Alexander Brodsky, a Russian artist, had wanted to "do something big underground" in New York's cavernous subway system.

While wandering around the Canal Street station at Broadway last winter, Mr. Brodsky noticed a long section of track idled for renovation. In a flash of inspiration, he thought: Subway tracks! Canal Street! Why not make big gondolas and float them underground?

His patron, Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, blanched at backing the idea. It seemed big and, above all, expensive. But Peggy Kaplan of the Feldman gallery suggested that Mr. Brodsky submit a proposal to the Public Art Fund, a nonprofit art group that was soliciting artists for a competition to put art in places that were as public as possible.

Out of 400 applicants, Mr. Brodsky's submission was one of four winners. The Metropolitan Transportation Authority, which must insure that art conforms to safety standards, also liked the idea. "When you see something as delightful as that," said Sandra Bloodworth, director of the M.T.A.'s Arts for Transit, "why wouldn't you do it?"

Mr. Brodsky got approval for for a \$30,000 sculpture of eight gondolas, floating in a 62-foot-long tank of water. The exhibit opened Dec. 4 and will close this Friday, to let track construction resume. Mr. Brodsky



Chester Higgins Jr./The New York Times

Venice it's not but the Canal Street subway station has its own gondolas.

has not decided what he will do with the sculpture.

It took 15 workers some 10 days to build the sculpture. A 200-foot hose from an ordinary faucet filled the 5,000-gallon tank in two days.

Mr. Brodsky's gondolas, some as long as 15 feet, are not exactly like the ones found in Venice. The cutout figures resemble shadow puppets rather than mustachioed gondoliers

in striped shirts, and, because Chinatown is so near, passers-by sometimes refer to the gondolas as Vietnamese or Chinese junks.

The sculpture is between the tracks on the transfer point between the 6 and the N and R trains. Even at its hefty size, the artwork is easy to miss, especially if a rider has stepped off a downtown 6 train. Turning left toward the hallway leading to

UNDERGROUND AQUATICS

GoBeCa

Some facts about the Gondolas Below Canal by Alexander Brodsky:

Weight 2.5 tons

Tank 868 square feet of plywood resting on 100 cinder blocks. Contains about 5,000 gallons of water. Took the artist two days to fill from an ordinary Metropolitan Transportation Authority faucet.

Construction 15 workers built the tank, 8 gondolas and 10 other figures in 10 days.

Source: *The Public Art Fund*

the N and R trains leads away from the sculpture, which is a few hundred feet to the right. Uptown passengers on the 6 train automatically walk past the cul-de-sac with the gondolas.

Indeed, if Mr. Brodsky had had an unlimited budget, he would have expanded the gondolas into an armada stretching the full 400 feet of unused track "so no one would miss it."

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