

MOSCOW

Alexander Brodsky

WINZAVOD CENTER FOR CONTEMPORARY ART

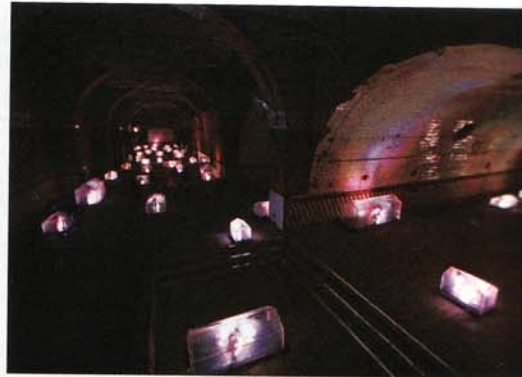
Architects often aspire to build something larger than life, appreciated by multitudes. But bigness can also be banal—hulking residential developments that exemplify bare necessity in dense urban space—or even threatening, a reminder of the individual's weakness. These side effects surface in the art of Alexander Brodsky, a practicing architect who channels critical thoughts on his trade in sculptures and installations. *Night Before the Attack*, 2009, co-organized by the Winzavod Center for Contemporary Art and M+J Guelman Gallery, was his most recent dramatization of the emotive associations of structure and scale. The long vaults of a nineteenth-century winery's defunct storage cellar, with a total area of some twenty-six-thousand square feet, were scattered with nearly a hundred shin-high, filmy plastic tents. Each was illuminated from within by pinkish bulbs; their light flickered as it hit thin strips of paper fluttering over small fans. White plaster figurines—mini-monuments with angular heads suggestive of prehistoric statuary—huddled pensively in groups of two or more over the simulated campfires. Brodsky's programmatic title instructed viewers to read the tableau as a settlement's mobilization in the face of danger. The tents and figurines thus constitute a kind of three-dimensional rendering of history painting, with the theatrical qualities of the environment compensating for absent details of setting and period. Abstract theatrical tension was inherent in the way the darkness filled the high-ceilinged basement and encroached on the tents; it came from the contrast between the dank air and the points of warm light. When a structure outlives its functional use, other properties can come to the fore, and Brodsky deftly exploits this vulnerability to the imputation of a new symbolic value.

Other works by Brodsky were on view in Moscow concurrently with *Night Before the Attack*. An exhibition of conceptual architecture from the 1980s and early '90s at the Tretyakov Gallery included twelve of his finely detailed, whimsical etchings made in collaboration with Ilya Utkin, which inserted human characters into architectural drawings to narrate the alienating aspects of urban space. The Third Moscow Biennale at the Garage Center for Contemporary Culture included Brodsky's *20 Trash Bins*, 2002, in which the glass-and-mirror

grid of a futuristic fantasy city spread inside rows of rusted Dumpsters. Interior and exterior engaged in a spatial montage as the bins' crusty substance collided with the naive ambition of the toy city. Devices seen in these earlier works were employed again in *Night Before the Attack*: The basement ruins became a shabby shell that contained a narrative of vulnerability. The large scale presented Brodsky with new opportunity.

This time, rather than modeling structures on the shrunken scale of comics or toys, allowing the viewer to contemplate up close the gap between architecture's aspirations and realities, Brodsky lined a real relic of the past with an evocation of an uncertain future. As you walked among the mass repetition of identical figurines in near-identical tents, the present felt slower; the flicker of fake fire in the statues' motionless faces suspended the moment.

—Brian Droitcour



Alexander Brodsky,
*Night Before the
Attack*, 2009, mixed
media installation.